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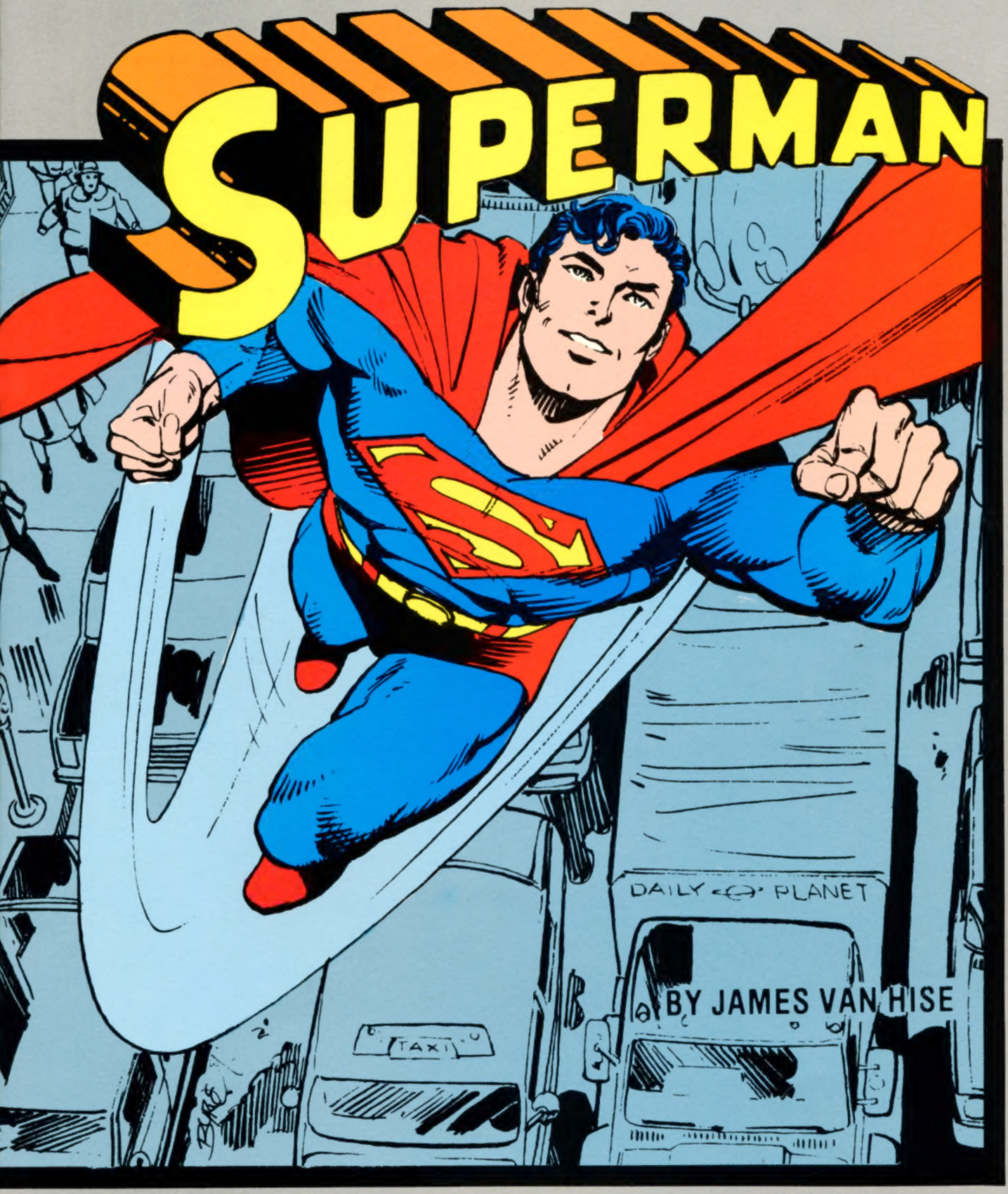
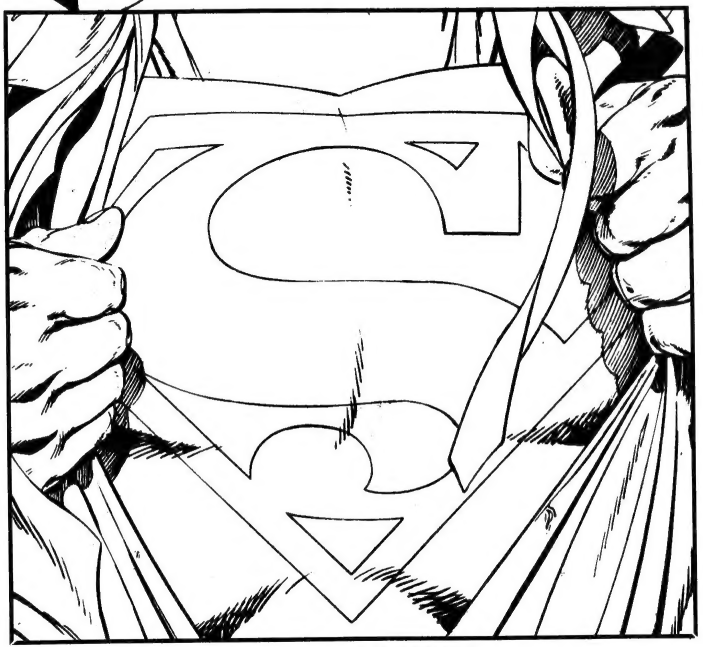


MAN OF STEEL

THE COMICS FILE MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT ON:

SUPERMAN FILES



BY JAMES VAN HISE

COMIC FILE MAGAZINE NUMBER THREE

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COMICS FILE MAGAZINE is published to provide a historical record of that phase of American popular culture known as comic books. If this book helps to preserve the record of the many accomplishments of the talented creators working in that field, for whatever company, then it will have admirably served the purpose for which it was created.

Dedicated to two kids from Cleveland and one from Canada

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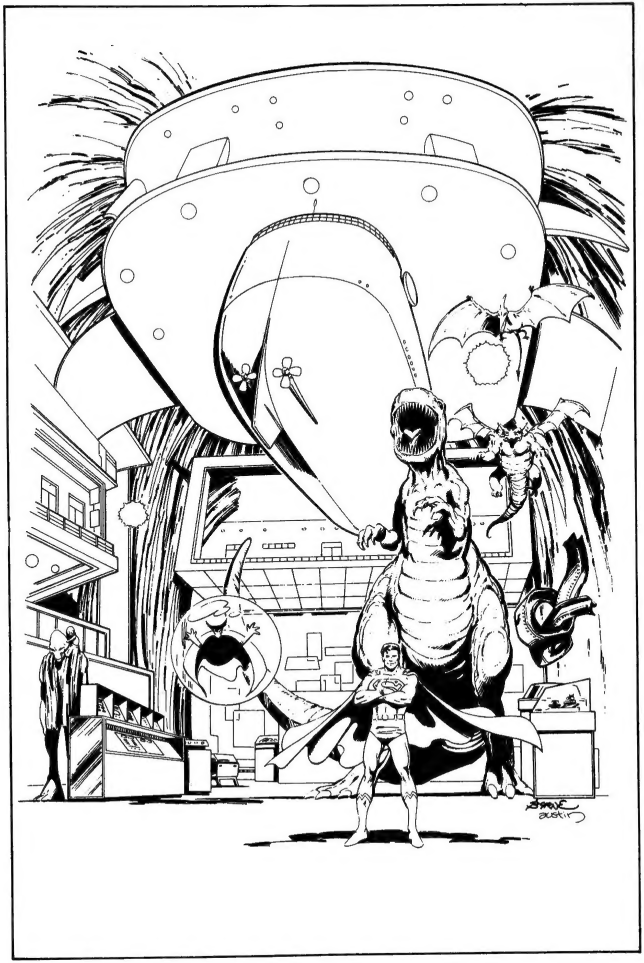


Introduction

Superman is the father of all superheroes. The very first of a kind. Sure, even before the birth of the Man of Steel, there were heroes who seemed larger than life, some of whom even had powers above and beyond those of mortal men. But Superman was the very first to combine a colorful action costume with superhuman power to experience adventures in that colorful milieu of the four color page. After Superman the doors were open, and a torrent of longjohn-garbed crusaders rushed to fill our newsstands.

Being the first carries certain responsibilities and certain duties that others didn't have to face. In the real world, he was the headliner for an entire comic book company, and through much of his career the best-selling comic book character in America. On the four color page, he always helped form every team and, at some point or another, teamed up with virtually every other comic book character to offer an example of what a hero could hope to be.

Sure, along the way he began to tarnish a little around his Steel edges, and the tomorrow that he promised seemed to dim just a bit as his universe became populated with virtually every flavor of Kryptonite and it began to appear that there were literally millions of other super-powered Kryptonians that escaped to populate the comic book universe—but he was still unique. And the time has finally come for that special quality to be restored as a talented writer/artist has been brought in to polish up the image.

Yes, he was the very first. But he still has lots and lots of special magical adventures to undertake!

HAL SCHUSTER, July, 1986

BYRNE
JUSTICE

THE LEGEND

While Superman didn't cause comic books to come into being, he did change the face of them forever.

Just as with many early comic strip heroes, the inspiration for Superman came from the pulp magazines of the early Thirties. Young Jerry Siegel was an avid reader of science fiction. With a touch of Doc Savage and an especially large dose of Philip Wylie's 1930 novel *Gladiator*, it didn't take much for the seventeen year old Jerry Siegel to dream up his own version of a fantastic hero.

Hugo Danner, the hero of Wylie's novel, possessed most of the attributes of the early Superman, including an ability to leap which was much like flying. Possessing super-hard skin, Danner can be hurt by an exploding artillery shell, but ordinary bullets just bounce off.

Conceived in 1933, Jerry quickly shared his idea with his friend Joe Shuster and together they began developing the concept. At first their Superman wore civilian clothes, but gradually they designed the basic costume with which he would become identified and which would be only slightly modified throughout his comic book life.

Superman would become a hit with readers. But he was not a hit with the editors whom Siegel and Shuster pitched the strip to for five full years. All of the newspaper strip syndicates rejected it as unsuitable and not at all what they were looking for. It was a quirk of fate that brought it into comic books.

BEFORE BYRNE

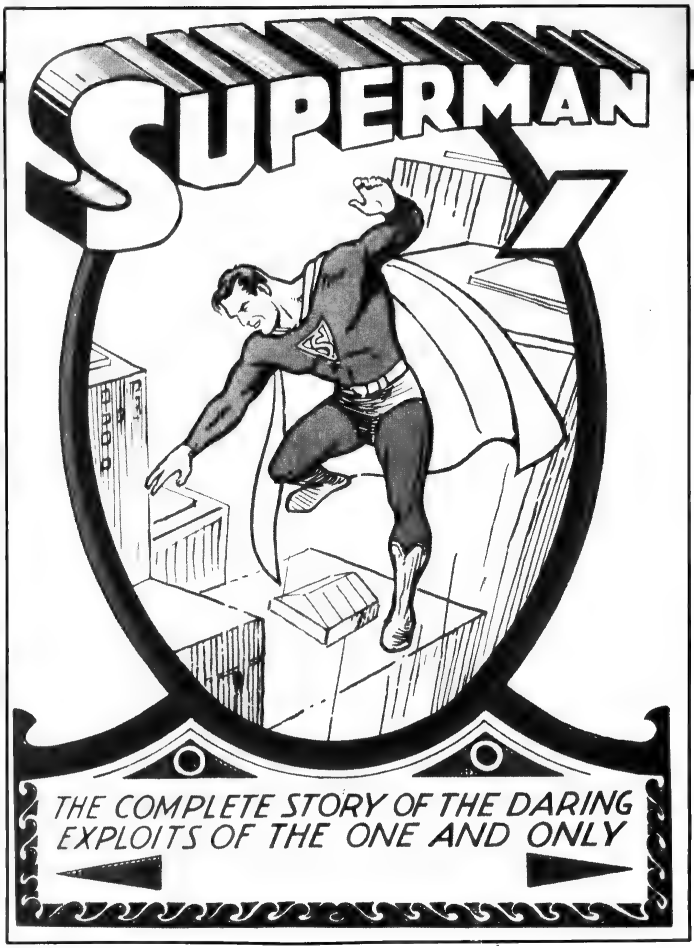
The strip idea was sitting on the desk of M.C. Gaines (the father of William Gaines of E.C. and Mad comics fame) at the McClure Syndicate. It was about to be rejected yet another time when Gaines received a call from Harry Donenfeld who had recently taken over the interests of Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson and was trying to assemble material for a new book. Comic books up to this time had largely consisted of vastly shrunken-down reprints of newspaper strips. This one would be all new material. While such a thing had been tried before, they had always pretty much just been imitations of existing newspaper strips. In fact, Siegel and Shuster had worked for Donenfeld previously, drawing "Federal Men", "Slam Bradley", "Spy", "Henri Duval", "Dr. Occult" and "Radio Squad". They were grateful that the story would see print, even if it wouldn't be on as grand a scale as a nationally syndicated newspaper strip.

Action 1 was a success but it wasn't until the fourth issue that the publishers realized that it was Superman that was making it one. Investigations had indicated that this might be so. When they featured the red, yellow and blue garbed avenger on the cover of the fourth issue, it sold out. He was the first costumed super-hero and his success inspired countless others.

Thus the legend was born. Working from their small office in Cleveland, Siegel and Shuster hired other artists to ghost both the comic book and the syndicated newspaper strip. What there had been no interest in for six years had suddenly become one of the hottest properties around. The artists hired to assist Shuster, who was even then developing eye problems, were Paul Cassidy, Loe Nowack and John Sikela (who would later draw all of the stories in the first issue of *Superboy* in 1949). But the artist who had the most impact on the strip also came into it at this time. His name is Wayne Boring.

While fans associate Wayne Boring with the Superman stories of the Fifties, Boring was also very much in evidence in the Forties. In fact it was his slick and highly polished style which brought a sleek and graceful look to the strip replacing the old, Thirties style of drawing employed by Joe Shuster. Much of the art done in the early Forties which was attributed to Joe Shuster was actually ghosted by Wayne Boring. The look of Superman which continued through the late Sixties, Seventies and into today was established by Wayne Boring over forty years ago. D.C. has been so conscious of this slick look that when Jack Kirby drew several issues of *Jimmy Olsen* in the early Seventies, all of the appearances of Superman were redrawn by Curt Swan.

Curt Swan joined D.C.'s staff in 1945, drawing a Boy Commandoes story as his try-out assignment. He did so well that he remained with the strip for three or four more years. He then drew a few Superboy stories but his first Superman story didn't come until 1955 when he worked on the Superman 3-D comic (which was reprinted in 1966). Thereafter he occasionally drew Superman stories doing more and more as the Sixties progressed.


SUPERMAN
THE COMPLETE STORY OF THE DARING
EXPLOITS OF THE ONE AND ONLY

In the Forties Superman underwent all of the real changes that the character would ever go through. His chest emblem's shape was established by around issue 9 of *Superman* magazine. His leaping became flying when the Fleischer animation studio explained that leaping did not look right on the screen and that they'd have to change the character so that his ability was more graceful. Interestingly, most of the character changes came from outside sources like this. Jimmy Olsen was introduced on the radio show so that Superman would have someone to talk to and thus advance the story. Jimmy was introduced in the comic books in *Superman 13*. Supposedly the radio show also introduced green kryptonite so that Superman would have a weakness as he was quickly becoming more super the more popular he became.

But while Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster made Superman an alien from another world because of their intense interest in science fiction, it took another man to nail that down and explain just why coming from another world meant that Superman was unique on Earth.

In the Fleischer Brothers cartoons they stated that Superman came from a "world of super-men." But if that was the case, why didn't the others escape from Krypton using their super powers? It was Mort Weisinger, former editor of the science fiction pulp magazine *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, who answered the questions that he knew readers must be asking about what makes Superman super.

"So he came from another planet and there's a difference in gravity? Why should he be able to fly? Why should he have X-Ray vision? It's contrary to science and reason," Weisinger stated. "I originated the concept that in a world circling a yellow sun his powers are multiplied, and that yellow sun gave him these abilities. These are the things the originators of Superman didn't figure out; they gave us this fabulous character without explaining why all his fabulous attributes existed."

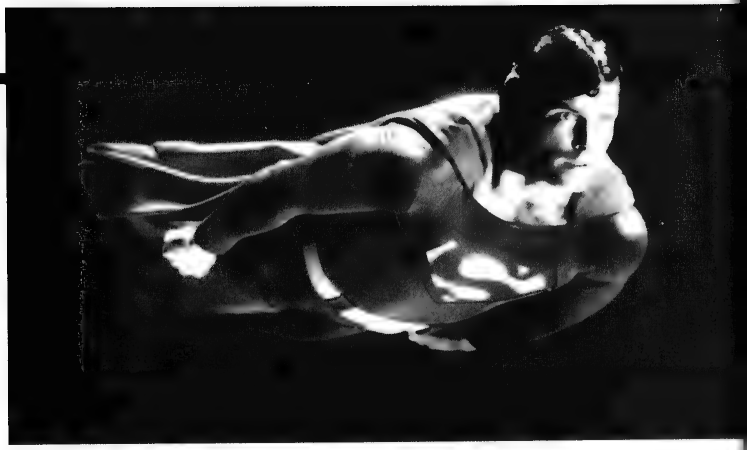
It was Mort Weisinger and his writers who introduced such now familiar features as The Phantom Zone, where criminals were exiled on Krypton since the society did not believe in capital punishment. He also introduced the bottled city of Kandor which had been shrunken down by the super criminal Brainiac before Krypton exploded. It was Weisinger and his writers, people such as science fiction great Edmond Hamilton, who began revealing that Superman was not the sole survivor of Krypton. Besides the Phantom Zone criminals who would periodically escape to wreck havoc, *Action 252* introduced Superman's cousin, who would come to be known as Supergirl.

It was explained that an asteroid-sized chunk of Krypton was hurled into space by the explosion. The people were able to survive by putting down thick lead shielding against the Kryptonite rays emitted by the piece of their world which had now developed radioactive properties deadly to them. For years this worked. Superman's cousin was born and grew to adolescence, but then a meteor shower destroyed the lead shielding and the girl's parents put her in a small rocket and propelled her towards the Earth. There she was found by Suprman. For no particularly good reason other than to have things handled differently, Superman asked his cousin to keep her existence a secret. So she lived at an orphanage and performed supermissions secretly until she was officially revealed to the world in *Action 285*, nearly three years later.

It was under Weisinger that the "imaginary story" was introduced, which is D.C.'s version of what Marvel does in *What If?*. The only differenceis that Marvel says that theirs is an *alternate reality* while D.C. labels theirs as outright imaginary tales. No real difference at all.

The most famous of all the Superman imaginary stories is "The Death Of Superman" in *Superman 149* (November, 1961) in which Lex Luthor finds a cure for cancer, pretends to go straight and then traps Superman once and for all, killing him with a kryptonite ray. This occurred during the period that Suprgirl was still working as Superman's "secret weapon". In this story she makes her dramatic appearance to the world by capturing Luthor and taking him to Kandor where he is sentenced to the Phantom Zone.

Some fans prefer "The Amazing Story of Superman Red and Superman Blue" in *Superman 162*, but this is more of a wish-fulfillment story. Superman is divided into two Supermen, one with a predominantly red costume and the other with a predominantly blue one. They proceed to marry the women of their choice (one marries Lana Lang, the other Lois Lane) and solve all of the ills of the world, including putting an anti-evil ray into orbit so that all criminals reform. As dark as "The Death of Superman" is, that's how light is "The Amazing Story Of Superman Red and Superman Blue".



But probably the all-time favorite Suprman legend is "Superman's Return to Krypton" in *Superman 141* which features some of Wayne Boring's finest art in the series. What's more surprising is that it is *not* an imaginary story! While attempting to pursue a strange alien creature, Superman flies too fast and crashes through the time barrier into the past where he finds himself within sight of Krypton and its red sun. Knowing that he'll lose his powers he quickly lands on the planet. While there he falls in love with an actress he meets while working as an extra on a movie, and even meets his parents — at their wedding. Another quirk enables him to escape Krypton's fate but the ending is rather pat compared to the rest of the story.

Inexplicably, Wayne Boring was fired by Weisinger in 1966. After doing a little work for Marvel comics he went into commercial art and today works as a security guard — but he may yet do a new Superman story or two.

Another Weisinger innovation was red kryptonite, a form which was not deadly but which could have peculiar effects on any former Kryptonian. Its changes varied from splitting them into two people, temporarily stealing their powers, giving them amnesia, making them fat, tiny or insane. The effects are temporary and the same piece of red K cannot affect the same person twice.

In the early Seventies, all of the kryptonite on Earth was neutralized so that writers had to seek elsewhere for possibilities. Superman was updated by having him become a TV journalist instead of a newspaper reporter. But other than continuing subplots (such as Vandal Savage coming from Earth II to our world where he's a legitimate businessman despite what Superman knows of his nefarious activities on our parallel world), the stories are fairly average. The only really exciting things in the book lately have been some stories by Marv Wolfman illustrated by Gil Kane for *Action Comics*. Kane brings a pleasant early Sixties look to the strip and Wolfman's stories have tended to be inventive the way the best of the old Superman stories were.

Oddly enough, the best Superman story done in years was not in the comics but in the first Superman motion picture, directed by Richard Donner. There was clearly a lot of respect for the material and the introduction, showing a boy reading an old Superman story which fades into the globe on the Daily Planet building, got everything off to a glorious start. Richard Donner infused the first film with a heart that was all but missing in the second and stabbed through and through in the third. The third film is notable only because the artificial kryptonite is apparently red K as its effects, although more prolonged, are quite similar.

After the first Superman film came out in 1978, people started wondering why the comic book isn't written with as much force and dynamism. The first film *seemed* real whereas the comic book reads like a comic book, even on its best days.

In *The History of Comics*, Jim Steranko best recognized the position that Superman was in, then and now, when he said, "If he has weakened, we must remember that like the legendary Atlas, Superman bears the weight of the comic world upon his shoulders. If he has been momentarily eclipsed by the scintilla of stylistic trends, we must understand his position is one of stability, not of change. And if he has grown weary we must embrace him for the ten thousand and one battles he has fought, outselling all his imitators put together, for his is a timeless triumph and from his life stream all hero strips flow.

"He is a superman among supermen."

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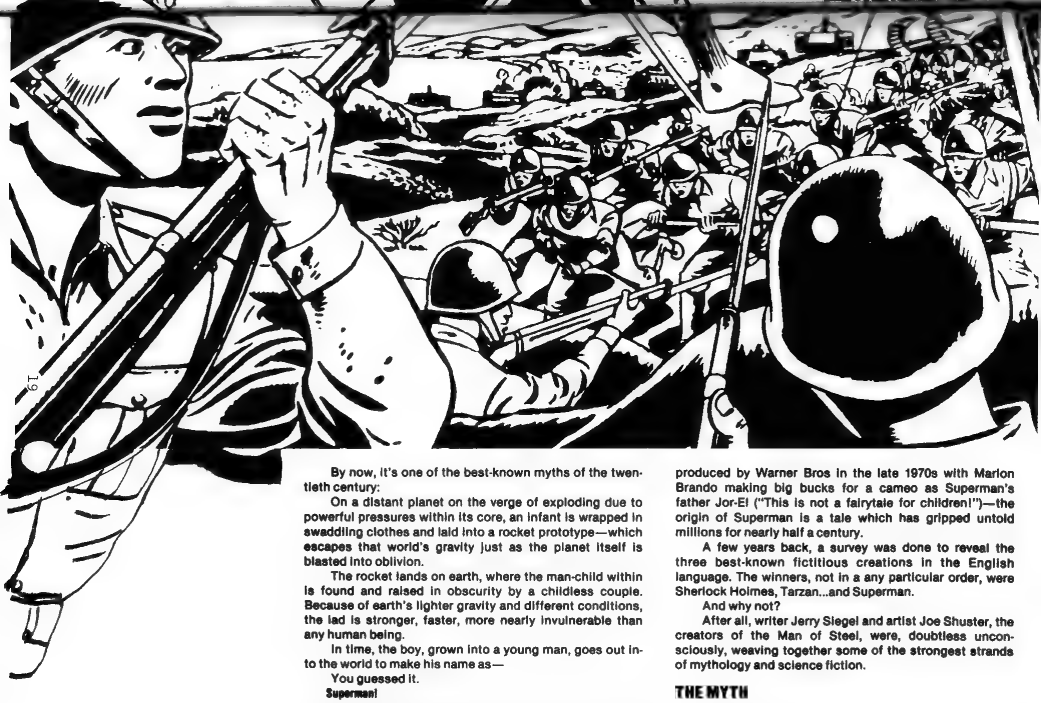
SUPERMAN AT WAR

18
WARNING: DON'T READ THIS STORY WITHOUT FIRST SETTING YOUR SHOCK ABSORBERS FOR SOME OF THE HARDEST JOLTS OF SURPRISE YOU'VE EVER RUN ACROSS! FOR SUPERMAN, THUS FAR SUCCESSFUL IN EVERY BATTLE, AT LAST IS BROUGHT FACE TO FACE WITH DEFEAT--AND THERE FINDS THE GREATEST VICTORY OF ALL! A CONTRADICTION? YOU MAY NOT THINK SO WHEN YOU HAVE COME TO THE END OF THIS AMAZING TALE ABOUT--"AMERICA'S



By now, it's one of the best-known myths of the twentieth century:

On a distant planet on the verge of exploding due to powerful pressures within its core, an infant is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid into a rocket prototype—which escapes that world's gravity just as the planet itself is blasted into oblivion.

The rocket lands on earth, where the man-child within is found and raised in obscurity by a childless couple. Because of earth's lighter gravity and different conditions, the lad is stronger, faster, more nearly invulnerable than any human being.

In time, the boy, grown into a young man, goes out into the world to make his name as—

You guessed it.

Superman!

Whether sketched simply yet wonderfully by Joe Shuster in the 1930s—or done with the crude special effects of the Columbia movie serial makers and early tv crews in the late 1940s and early 1950s—or lavishly produced by Warner Bros in the late 1970s with Marlon Brando making big bucks for a cameo as Superman's father Jor-El ("This is not a fairytale for children!")—the origin of Superman is a tale which has gripped untold millions for nearly half a century.

A few years back, a survey was done to reveal the three best-known fictitious creations in the English language. The winners, not in a any particular order, were Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan...and Superman.

And why not?

After all, writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, the creators of the Man of Steel, were, doubtless unconsciously, weaving together some of the strongest strands of mythology and science fiction.

THE MYTH

The myth of the child sent away for his own safety and raised by foster parents goes back to the Greek gods, of course—that's how Zeus escaped the wrath of his father

Kronos, for instance—and finds one of its greatest expressions in the story of Moses.

The all-but-invulnerable hero, naturally, has roots in Gilgamesh, Hercules, Achilles and many another. (Even Achilles once tried to hide his true identity by disguising himself as a woman. But that was because he was a draft-dodger in the early stages of the Trojan War, so maybe it doesn't count.)

The story of a man from a larger planet who goes to a smaller one, where altered conditions give him powers far beyond those of the latter's inhabitants, was well-told a quarter of a century before Superman—by a first-time author named Edgar Rice Burroughs. His hero's name? John Carter, soon to be Warlord of a Mars our Pioneer probes would never recognize.

And only a few years before Siegel and Shuster created their masterpiece, author Philip Wylie had told the story of an Earthman born with fantastic strength, near-invulnerability and the ability to leap hundreds of feet at a time. That hero's name was Hugo Danner, and the book was called *Gladiator*.

Still, all these antecedents take little away from Jerry Siegel's waking dream one night which resulted next morning in his and Shuster's creating one of modern popular literature's most famous figures.

Jerry and Joe did their seminal work in 1934. It then took them four years (and being rejected by virtually every newspaper syndicate in the country) to see their creation finally appear in the legendary first issue of **Action Comics**, setting both comic books and the rest of the world on their collective ear.

1938

'Twould probably be easy to come up with a musical or comedic review about "that wonderful year 1938."

But it really wasn't so wonderful, at all, in most ways. The start of World War Two in Europe was only a year away, as Adolf Hitler's Germany and a militarist/imperialist Japan and a fascist Italy made ready to divide the world between them.

So what effect did Superman have on that greatest, most terrible of wars to date?

That's the weird part.

Almost none.

It was inevitable, one supposes.

After all, Superman was just way too powerful to be unleashed on Nazi or Japanese or Fascist soldiers. In those days before Kryptonite was invented (ironically enough, for radio, not for the comics themselves at first), Superman may not have been the trans-super hero he would become, able to destroy the Earth "just by listening hard," as comics writer Dennis O'Neil once succinctly put it.

Still, in real life, any being so powerful would have been considered a "secret weapon" by the side which was lucky enough to have him—and he'd have been pressed into service against the enemy. What's more, a man as patriotic for his adopted land as Clark Kent would doubtless have *gone*, believing as he did in truth, justice and the American way.

SUPERWARRIOR

World War Two would have been greatly shortened by the addition of Superman (to say nothing of all the American superheroes who came after him)—or at the very least, that war would have been altered most unhistorically. It's almost impossible to conceive of Superman failing, for instance, in an attempt to fly to Berlin and capture (if not throttle) Adolf Hitler. And that would probably have led to an armistice, at least in Europe—nor would it have been much harder for Supes to kidnap Japan's divine emperor.

And of course, that could not be—not unless Siegel, Shuster and DC Comics had taken the route of an "alternate Earth." And that would have confused things even more! This was supposed to be *our* world on which Superman lived, not the parallel Earth of DC's **Watchmen** or Marvel's **Squadron Supreme**.

So, quite simply, something had to be done!

After all, as early as **Action 2**, the Man of Tomorrow (as he was then known) showed his prowess by bringing to a halt a war in San Monte, "a small South American republic."

How?

In Mike Hammer's immortal words, "It was easy."

He leaped from one faction's camp to the other, scooping up each side's army commander—and ordered the two to fight it out between themselves. An old ploy that goes back, perhaps, to the day when such things worked in Homer's *Iliad* if not necessarily in real life—but it worked!

The two commanders discovered they really had nothing against each other, shook hands and the war was ended.

Such a thing might (or more likely, might not) work in El Salvador or Lebanon in 1986. But it worked in 1938, in San Monte, in **Action Comics 2**.

And in that single story, Superman showed a strongly pacifist streak which ran through the strip even during the early days of the Second World War.

BACK HOME

For, in the days to come, Superman's "wars" were less military foes. First came the Ultra-Humanite, earliest of his regular foes—soon superceded by the original red-headed Luthor (no "Lex" yet, for some years).

He repaired bursting dams and fought for prison reform and even launched a "one-man war" against reckless drivers.

He visited Kidtown and launched a personal crusade against illegal gambling in his new hometown of Metropolis and still found time to visit the 1939 New York World's Fair.

And then:

"The armed batallions of *Toran* unexpectedly swoop down upon a lesser nation, *Galonia*."

So began the adventure in **Action 22** (published in late 1939 with a March 1940 cover date), in which Clark Kent and Lois Lane were sent to Europe as correspondents, to cover the hostilities.

Of course, by this time, England and France were already officially at war with Nazi Germany. But it was still what the press called a "phony war," a "sitzkrieg," in which neither side really fought the other following the swift collapse of Poland a few months earlier. So "Toran" and "Galonia" were created to make up the difference.

Interestingly, Clark/Superman spent the whole time battling the machinations of a "foreign movie actress" named Lita Laverne, who turned out to be a Toranian spy. And in the story's climax, after single-handedly wrestling and destroying a Toranian bomber, Superman turned a torpedo back against the Toranian sub which had launched it against a ship of a neutral nation.

When the Man of Tomorrow then burst into a Toranian war council, he forced Toran's head general to admit he had planned this heinous action against a neutral vessel. So disgraced was the general that he was replaced in a "shake-up" of Toran's military, and presumably the war

TONS OF STEEL CHARGE OVER THE PROSTRATE FIGURE IN THE CRIMSON CAPE! BUT ABRUPTLY...
EASIER TO MAKE IT CRAWL OVER ME THAN TO CRAWL UNDER!
I'M GETTING OUT!

ended.

This, of course, was definitely a fantasy version of the real war which had thus far been felt only by such nations as Poland and China.

The cover of that issue of **Action**, though, showed the mixed minds of the publishers at that time.

Rather than a war scene, related to the story inside, it featured a shot of Superman battling a crook driving a steam shovel.

THE PACIFIST MOVES CLOSER TO WAR

But Superman's pacifist views—undoubtedly like those of his creators and publishers—had begun to change, as America moved closer to war.

And in one pre-Pearl Harbor story (reprinted, like the San Monte story, in Crown Publications' invaluable volume *Superman: From the Thirties to the Eighties*), Nazi Germany was finally identified as an enemy of the United States in all but name.

At a "Dukalia"-American Sports Festival being held in Metropolis, Dukalian consul Karl Wolff held his audience spellbound with the following speech:

"Present here is the flower of Dukalian youth! You have seen them perform physical feats which no other human beings can. Proof, I tell you, that we Dukalians are superior to any other race or nation! Proof that we are entitled to be the masters of America!"

Sound familiar?

All based, of course, on a somewhat naked reading of the statements of the German-American Bund, the homegrown Nazi organization.

This was too much for Clark Kent, as it turned out. Changing to Superman, he threw Karl Wolff for a shot-put and finally left him sitting atop a flagpole, humiliated.

And soon, the Man of Steel had thwarted a Dukalian plan to blow up the Panama Canal—with the obligatory rescue of Lois Lane tossed into the mix, naturally.

If anybody reading the monthly **Action** and its new quarterly companion-mag **Superman** had any doubt, America was coming down firmly on the side of England, France and the Allies—and against the dictator nations Germany, Italy and Japan.

DEC. 7, 1941

Then came Sunday, December 7, 1941.

The sneak attack on Pearl Harbor plunged America into war with imperial Japan on Monday, and with Germany and Italy a couple of days later when Hitler and Mussolini obligingly spared President Roosevelt the trouble of trying to get the U.S. Congress to declare war on Japan's Axis allies.

Ironically, the Nov./Dec. 1941 issue of **Superman** (actually on sale a couple of months before Pearl Harbor) had finally showed our hero smashing a gunboat sporting **—at last!—**the German cross, if not the more infamous swastika.

Still, as has been told over and over again, when Superman finally tried to join the army, he flunked the physical!

He went to sign up, of course, as Clark Kent. And the doctors were duly impressed by his pectorals and general physique.

It was his eyesight that got him in trouble.

It was too good!

For, by this time, Clark had developed X-ray vision, a power he hadn't had in the early days of the strip—and when asked to read an eyechart, he accidentally read the one in the next room.

Result: He flunked, and was washed out of the service.

Of course, he could doubtless have tried again and shown that it was all a mistake. But then the problem of how World War Two would have lasted past the first few weeks of 1942 would have reared its ugly head again!

So Siegel, Shuster and DC Comics left well enough alone...and Superman cooled his heels on the Home Front for the duration, fighting spies, saboteurs, criminals and profiteers.

What do you do when you're faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings at a single bound — and your country *still* won't let you join the army?

That, in a nutshell, was the terrible problem that faced Kal-L, alias Clark Kent, alias Superman, during World War Two after he flunked his army physical.

From there on, Superman was pretty strictly a Home Front hero for "the duration," as the phrase went at the time.

Fortunately, there was plenty there to keep the Man of Steel and his readers occupied.

Of course, there was always his arch-enemy Luthor. (The "Lex" wasn't added till years later, when the "L.L." fetish began accidentally with Lois Lane in 1938.) Luthor had started out as a redhead and had lost all his hair 'twixt one early story and the next, but except for an inability to grow hair he seemed capable of nearly any scientific achievement you could think of.

Always for the advancement of evil, naturally.

One of the most memorable Superman—Luthor encounters began in **Action Comics** 47. Luthor got his hands on an ancient talisman known as "The Powerstone," which turned him into a giant who was even a match for the Kryp-

tonian. It took a second story (in **Superman** 17) to dispose permanently of the Powerstone.

(Permanently, that is, if you don't count the rematch artist Jerry Ordway and I dreamed up for some early 80s issues of **All-Star Squadron**. But that time around, Superman's old foe The Ultra-Humanite had got hold of the Powerstone, and it took practically the entire 1942 DC super-hero lineup to set things aright).

Luthor was indefatiguable, though.

Once, when he evidently got tired of fighting Supes under his own name, he even temporarily adapted the identity of "The Light."

LOTS OF BAD GUYS

But even on those rare occasions when he didn't break out of prison for two or three months at a stretch, the Man of Tomorrow was kept busy by a long list of villains: The Archer, Puzzler, Toyman, Domino, Metalo, Funnyface, The Leopard, Cobra King, The Lynx, Prankster, plus a host of non-costumed antagonists.

They mostly had one thing in common. If you didn't count their mechanical contrivances and maybe a death ray or three, they were really just "normal guys," and thus hardly a fair match for Superman in those pre-Kryptonite days.

Oh, there were a *few* war-related stories, from time to time. Most memorably, in 1943, in a story entitled "America's Secret Weapon," the Man of Steel helped train U.S. troops by taking part in mock-war exercises at an Army base.

He was genuinely touched by the ovation he got when he arrived:

"American soldiers cheering me, when all civilized peoples in the world are cheering them! It's the grandest tribute I've every had!"

Superman's participation in the day's war games warped the results, of course. Real armies are rarely helped out by having a super-hero show up to lift their trucks across "bombed-out" bridges or to destroy an enemy's air cover.

An interesting twist to the story was that the army which had Superman on its side actually *lost* the day's games... which clearly demosntrated that the true "secret weapon"

of America was "the courage of the common soldier," not the powers of an alien *upermensch*.

Something strange was happening to Superman, though, and it wasn't just being a 4-F.

For now that the skies over America were filled with super-heroes (at least in the comic-books), Superman was not as unique as he had once been. And many of them had some gimmick or other designed to make them stand out from the costumed crowd.

There was The Human Torch, an android who burst into fire — the Sub-Mariner, who could both swim and fly at great speed and who was royalty besides — The Hawkman, who specialized in flying along — The Flash, who ran like the devil — the list goes on and on.

What's more, many of these rivals were even published by DC itself, which was then the largest comic-book publisher on the face of the war-torn globe.

So Superman, too, needed a gimmick.

A COMIC TWIST

Sure, he'd gained considerably in power since he'd come on the scene in '38. Now he could fly instead of merely leap 1/8 of a mile. He was stronger, faster, smarter ... and he'd picked up X-ray vision and super-hearing somewhere along the way, too.

But just having formidable powers hadn't been enough for Jerry Siegel's other creation, The Spectre, had they?

The Spectre had started out with, as someone once said, "roughly the powers of God," and had wound up invisible, serving as a virtual sidekick to a bumbling plainclothes cop named Percival Popp.

Nope, Superman clearly needed an edge.

The edge, somebody decided, was *humor.*

At the beginning of his career, he had occasionally been advertised as a great "adventure and humor" character, though the former had gotten the upper hand.

Now, someone decided to bring the humor back with a vengeance... not to mention a heavy hand.

Already, the list of wartime villains shows it starting: The Toyman with his madly inventive toys... The Prankster seemingly living only to play tricks on Superman....

But now, something new was added to the formula.

First, there was J. Wilbur Wolfingham, "the greatest conman of all time," introduced in **Superman** 28. A heavyset man sporting a monocle and a cigar, he plagued the Man of Steel with schemes to defraud old-time movie comedians of their life savings... schemes to sell a town a bogus oil well... schemes to swindle the lovelorn by promising young men rich wives.

Funny stuff, maybe, in its mild way... but hardly up to the promise of those early covers, which had portrayed Superman tossing around automobiles, smashing subs and planes, routing whole flame-throwing armies with his bare fists.

And then there was Mr. Mxyzptlk starting in **Superman 30.**

This imp from another dimension went Toyman and Prankster one better: he not only lived merely to bother Superman, but he had magic to help him. He'd better have had *something*, since he was maybe three feet tall, tops.

As almost everyone knows, Mxyzptlk could only be sent back to his own dimension by being tricked into saying his own name backward — quite a feat, actually, when you figure out that most people would have a helluva time just saying it *forward.*

No doubt about it: Mxyzptlk was popular from the start. He returned and returned and returned, and almost nobody who's read Supes' adventures for any period of time needs any introduction to him.

(Heck, I had a good time myself sticking him into the first story I ever wrote for DC, and I tossed in Hoppy the Marvel Bunny for good measure and consider the result one of my favorite tales among those I've written... but the fact remains that, back in the 40s, something more had been

SUPERMAN
BUT I AM NO ORDINARY MAN!
I AM MR. MXYZPTLK!
IN THE COURSE OF YOUR COMIC BOOK ADVENTURES, YOU'VE NO DOUBT MET MANY ODD CHARACTERS BUT NONE AS ODD AS MR. MXYZPTLK! HE KNOWS ALL MR. MXYZPTLK'S WEAKNESSES AND KNOWS HOW TO OUTWIT HIM! BUT DON'T RUSH TO THE NEWS STAND JUST YET! FOR THE MAN WHO'S SUPERMAN HIMSELF IS PUZZLED HOW TO PROCEED IN THE NEXT ISSUE! SO WATCH FOR THE EXCITING ADVENTURES OF THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MXYZPTLK!!

needed to keep Supes on top of the super-hero heap.)

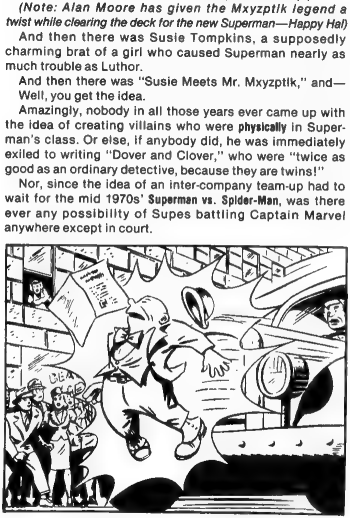
(Note: Alan Moore has given the Mxyzptlk legend a twist while clearing the deck for the new Superman—Happy Hal)

And then there was Susie Tompkins, a supposedly charming brat of a girl who caused Superman nearly as much trouble as Luthor.

And then there was "Susie Meets Mr. Mxyzptlk," and—Well, you get the idea.

Amazingly, nobody in all those years ever came up with the idea of creating villains who were **physically** in Superman's class. Or else, if anybody did, he was immediately exiled to writing "Dover and Clover," who were "twice as good as an ordinary detective, because they are twins!"

Nor, since the idea of an inter-company team-up had to wait for the mid 1970s' **Superman vs. Spider-Man**, was there ever any possibility of Supes battling Captain Marvel anywhere except in court.



A TALK WITH CARY BATES

SPLIT-SECONDS LATER, A MILE BENEATH THE ICE-CAP...
WH-WHAT IS IT... ANOTHER QUAKE?
NO...IT'S A SUPER-BEING... BORING THROUGH THE ICE TO RESCUE US...A SUPERMAN!
BUT SUPERMAN DIED CENTURIES AGO!
WHAMMMO
KRRRUNNNCH
KAPOW

A lot has happened in comics in the past twenty years and Cary Bates has been working as a write at DC Comics through most of it. Bates began writing during the Sixties when Mort Weisinger and Julie Schwartz were guiding Superman through some pretty strange days. He originally would conceive eye-catching covers (such as that for "The Real Clark Kent") but then graduated to writing. Bates was writing **The Flash** when Iris West was "killed off," but this was still in the days when death had miraculous cures, if not equally miraculous logic behind the denouements.

The era of DC described by Bates in this interview is very different from the more daring experiments taking place at DC Comics now. This is a tale of different times, when Superman's continuity was so entangled and over-populated that it was all a writer could do to make sense of it. This was when Carmine Infantino had just returned to **The Flash** and the **Superboy** comic (as well as the character!) still existed. It was a time when Supergirl still existed and before the entire Superman mythos underwent its recent drastic revision. Perhaps you'll read this as an exploration of a period in **Superman** that you particularly enjoyed, or else see it as an explanation for why things had to be so drastically reworked.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...

INTERVIEW

CF: We would like to familiarize (or remind) our readers with how you got started in comics, lo these many years ago.

BATES: Well, I really got started when I started submitting covers to DC back in the '60s. Like so many other writers I really wanted to be an artist. They were badly drawn. They were swipes. They were colored. I kept sending them in to Mort (Weisinger) and Julie (Schwartz). They started using them very early on. Back then they would give original artwork as...payment.

CF: Like a prize in a contest?

BATES: Well, more like payment. They wouldn't give you money, but they'd send you the original artwork. Back then nobody knew it was going to be worth anything and the artists weren't aware...

CF: That was their property?

BATES: Yeah. And that was before the fan market even existed. So I got a lot of original covers in the early sixties. What I started to do next (which is the natural progression) was to give them little plot synopses to go with the cover. What happened after a while was that they liked my covers but didn't like the way I drew (it really wasn't very good), but they started liking the stories more than the covers. Gradually it got to the point where I thought, 'What the Hell? Why don't I try a script on one of these ideas?" My first couple of scripts got rejected...

CF: About how old were you then?

BATES: This was around high school. This was all going on around my junior and senior years in high school. I started to experiment with writing late in my junior year Ironically enough one of the first scripts I turned in (which got rejected) was based on a cover which Mort (Weisinger) later gave to Jim Shooter. Jim ultimately did the story. Shooter actually started with Mort before I did. So Mort was continually playing us against each other. He'd ask Jim why he couldn't do what I did and vice versa. The real truth was he was just playing us off each other. He was really giving us a hard time by using...by continuing to remind us of each other, trying to get us to do better, to do more, whatever he wanted us to do.

Around the fall of 1966 I went to college. I wrote a script that sold. Again this was with a cover that I drew. Over Christmas I wrote another one and that sold. After that Mort gave me a rate and I started to turn them out regularly.

CF: Do you remember what your first couple of stories were?

BATES: The first one that appeared was a **WORLD'S FINEST** story. I can't remember the title but Superman's and Batman's faces were blacked out and they had big question marks over their faces. It was an imaginary story.

CF: I remember that...

BATES: I think Batman was Luthor or something. The other one was a little better. Actually the cover was one of the best that I ever came up with. It was "**The Real Clark Kent.**" This guy in chains and rags breaks into the Planet office and shining an X-ray beam at this **other** Clark Kent showing the Superman"s" while saying, "You've kept me locked up long enough. I'm the **real** Clark Kent." The story was lousy but I like the cover. That was the second of the first two stories...after that I started to work for Mort on an extremely regular basis.

CF: I knew that Julie Schwartz worked that way, but was it usual for Mort to have interesting covers prepared for writers to compose stories around?

BATES: Yes and no. Julie preferred doing covers first. With Mort I think it was more the case of **if** a cover idea presented itself or if they got one, they would write a story about it. But I think he was often in the position of trying to extract a cover from a story which is what I think DC does now most of the time. It's not that no one at DC likes that system, it's just that given the deadlines now, sometimes it's very difficult to take a day or two out and think up a cover. Julie and Carmine used to do that all the time for **FLASH** and a lot of the other characters. it has its drawbacks. I mean, sometimes it's good to have a scene which you hinge the story around. Other times you find you have to wedge the scene into the story because stories often go off on their own track.

CF: Yeah, sometimes the cover scene seems shoe-horned in...

BATES: Yeah, a lot of the old covers would be totally irrelevant dream sequences that were obviously stuck into the story to accomodate the cover.

CF: I remember a "Tunnel of Horrors" story in **THE FLASH (182)** where Flash says, "No! You can't force me to go in there!!" and it was just a momentary impulse in the story.

BATES: Then I started working for Julie. I sold a story to Julie in which Julie appeared. It was just a coincidence, I wasn't using it as an angle to get him to buy.

CF: "FLASH: Fact or Fiction?"

BATES: Right, and he did buy it. I didn't do anything with Julie for several months after that. When Mort left, when Mort retired, I was sort of in a bad position because I had only worked with him. None of the other editors at DC knew me (let alone my work) that much. Back then, DC was so segmented, each editor was like his own boss. They got very possessive about sharing their writers, characters...nothing like DC is today. So what I really had to do was virtually re-establish myself all over again with Murray Boltinoff and Julie.

CF: Simultaneously?

BATES: Yeah, I started to work for both of them. Now we're talking about 1969, 1970. By 1971 I was firmly re-established at DC in Mort's absence and I've been there ever since.

CF: When you were writing for Mort Weisinger back in the beginning did he ever establish guidlines for his stories to have?

BATES: Did he ever! Mort's kind of ship (for a lack of a better word) doesn't exist anymore but it was very, very successful for very many years. It's easy to criticize him but his track record remains. What he did was that he would literally plot the stories with the writer to the point where he was almost giving the writer the plot. To be exact, back in those days there were no credits given in the books so his was the only name that was actually associated with the **SUPERMAN** books. So that was what he would do. He was virtually the entire **SUPERMAN** line. He had his seven books for twenty or thirty years. He was a genius at creating gimmicks that would perpetuate the Superman myth. Things like Kandor and the Legion (of Super-Heroes), both of which were originally only one-shot story gimmicks. He didn't know what they'd turn into. It's like what Julie did with that Flash story where he introduced Jay Garrick. Little did he dream what it would turn into. Earth-Two was not expected to turn into what it has become now. There was no way of knowing what you were creating then because you couldn't look into the future to see what would evolve from it.

CF: It was just a good idea at the time.

BATES: Yeah. And there are a lot of other good ideas that have just fallen by the wayside, that have never been developed, but they're still there. Working for Mort was a real experience because he was the toughest editor in every aspect as far as working with freelancers.

CF: You didn't know that?

BATES: Well, see, here I was in Ohio and he was the only editor I had any contact with. He was buying my stuff and paying me money...

CF: And you had nothing to compare him with...

BATES: And you've got to remember that except for Shooter who was considered a fluke (not only because he was the only other newcomer but he was also something like 13, three years younger then myself) there was no other writer my age or in my predicament to compare notes with. I just assumed that that must be what it's like. It was only later that I learned that every editor wasn't like that. This isn't to say that everything about Mort was negative. He taught me a lot, but he was very rough. I think the thing I remember him best for was plotting. I learned much of that from him. And having worked for him first, I was able to take things better because I had had such a rigorous entrance in the business. Sometimes starting with the toughest is the best way, if you can survive it. I think Shooter is a better person, too, because even though they had a falling-out, he learned a lot and it kind of toughened him, too.

CF: Shooter credits Weisinger with forming his ideas of what a good story is and what sells to the market.

BATES: Yeah, Mort definitely had that knack.

CF: What exactly would Mort do to a script you submitted? You said that he would work with you on strengthening the plot.

BATES: Well, he mostly worked with you before the script was written because he would practically spoon-feed the plot to you. He liked to have a very tight rein on exactly what the story was, exactly what the tone of it was.

CF: And he'd tell you exactly why he wanted these elements there?

BATES: Yeah, we really couldn't vary it very much.

I think during his last three or four years at DC Mort wasn't doing all that much actual editing himself, but he kept a very tight control over the actual plotting and the covers. It was only during his last couple of years that he started not concentrating on that sort of thing all that much.

CF: How does Mort's concept of a story differ in any major way from any of the editor's with whom you've worked since?

BATES: Well, Mort's and Julie's concepts aren't really all that different. It's hard to put this in words...They're similar because they come from similar backgrounds and were both SF fans.

I think the basic thing that Mort lacked in his basic story concept (or didn't feel was important) was characterization. His characters after a while were locked into certain stereotypes.

CF: Just affectations, they really didn't have personalities.

BATES: Yeah. There were a few times he allowed characters to get out and really emote beyond the shackles he imposed on them. But more often than not you didn't see that in his stories.

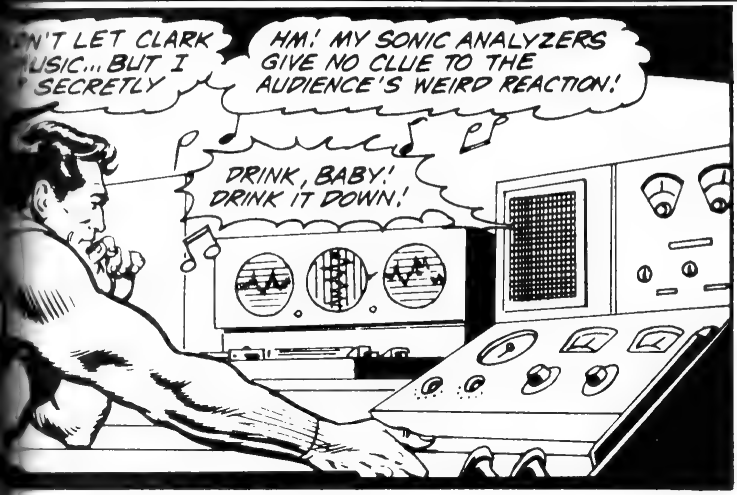
CF: And it's strange because the few times he did allow it...well, one example was the "**Phoney Death of Clark Kent**" (**SUPERMAN 210**). Nelson told us that they got phenomena mail response on that story. They just didn't follow it up.

BATES: Yeah. I think that all through the years that I've been there, stories that get the sharpest response have to do with emotions, whether the response is positive or negative. The mail I got after we killed Iris — I'd never seen mail like that. Some of it was hate mail, some it was really glad she was dead, and some of it was just agitated. They wanted to kill us, but they were hooked. They had to keep reading to see if it was real or not; and if it **was** real, how did it happen and why did it happen.I learned then that you could please them more successfully by agitating them than giving them what they wanted.

CF: As long as there was some kind of emotional content to the stories...

BATES: Exactly. If there is nothing in the story that you can emotionally hook onto then, you really have a story formula that may work for a while, but I can't see it continually bringing the reader back.

BATES: I think that's what happened towards the end of Mort's reign. His stories had worked for a long time, but


N'T LET CLARK
USIC... BUT I
SECRETLY
HM! MY SONIC ANALYZERS GIVE NO CLUE TO THE AUDIENCE'S WEIRD REACTION!
DRINK, BABY! DRINK IT DOWN!

they had gradually become formularized. They were almost predictable.

CF: There was at least one story during Mort's tenure which they used twice without changing any of the elements (**ACTION 281**).

BATES: Yes, very blatantly.

CF: Do you think that's right. Like I said, Mort was a genius in finding all these permutations in the Superman myth that no one had ever thought of before and that were springboards for dozens and dozens of stories, but I think that in addition to the gimmicks you need the emotional content to have something to identify with. Those kinds of things are universal whereas readers who weren't into the **SUPERMAN** legend wouldn't be as impressed or interested in one of these little...

CF: Continuity gambits...

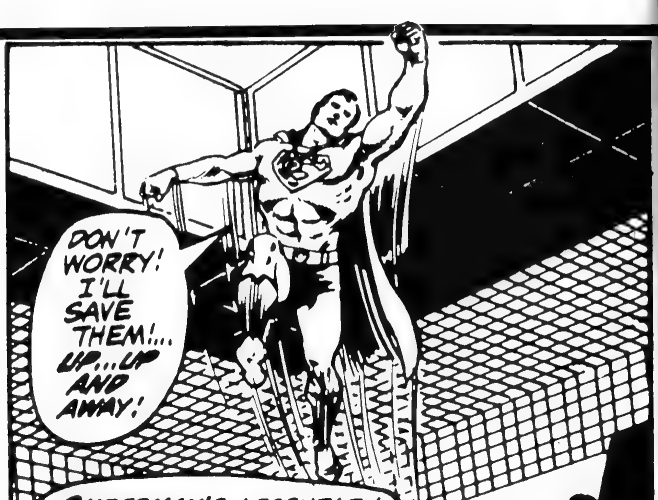
BATES: Yeah, Yeah! Whereas a new reader could really be bowled over by the emotional content even if he had never read the history of Kandor or knew what the Bizarro World was. Whereas these other things presuppose some kind of knowledge of familiarity with what had been established. For readers that are into those sorts of things, those stories are great. They can refer to earlier stories and every time a new nugget of information is established in the **SUPERMAN** legend they could say, "That explains that!" and they could add it to their mental encyclopedia. Even Mort, I think, realized in the last few years he was editing that that wasn't always the way to go. He kept telling me to write stories the way Shooter was writing them. Those stories had very little to do with traditional Superman staples. I think he was realizing even then that there was a different direction in which he could go.

CF: They needed to be a little heavier in characterization, too.

BATES: Yes. Yes. Jim was probably the first writer with Mort to start that. I think Mort was even actively seeking stories that didn't refer to the **SUPERMAN** legend or that didn't tell us about one of the kinds of Kryptonite that never existed. He would say, "I want a general story" (That was his term for it). I think that was something he realized after a couple of decades.

CF: You had a couple of other one-shot assignments. You wrote on **WONDER WOMAN?**

BATES: I wrote a couple for Kanigher. I've virtually written every character they have essentially just because of the years I've been here. I even did some romance stuff which



was not my favorite thing to do, but it was interesting. I think everything I've done has helped me in general because it's experience.

Every writer should be affected by things outside of comics. I think it's valuable to deal with every genre within comics, too. You get to know how the genres cross over. What I learned from romance comics I've since applied to the romantic situations in **SUPERMAN** comics. You can always find references in one kind of story to another. There is just so much cross-pollination.

CF: What kind of things do you read outside of comics? You just mentioned that a comics writer shouldn't just draw from the comics tradition.

BATES: I don't get it from reading as much as I get it from films. My main influence has always been films and I think that is my main influence as far as my writing. I've always put far less emphasis on words and captions than I do visuals. I think as far as comics go I think film is a far more valuable impetus than prose because there is so much more in film that can be applied to comics. There are probably a number of fine novelists who couldn't write a decent comic book to save their lives. A good analogy of mine is that a comic book page is virtually reading a strip of film and knowing which frames to cut out and which to leave in in order not to interfere with the story. Between two comic book panels there are a number of panels that have to be left out. The writer has to know which panels can be deleted. He has to be able to subtly juxtapose them in such a way as for the reader to understand what had to have happened between those two panels. A trick I've been doing for years is having a large number of panels left out that the readers are unaware I've left out. I imply that things have happened and the readers piece together what must have happened in the missing panels. I can do much more complicated plots that way than in the Mort Weisinger days where you had to spell everything out. What I do now in order to get my plots in 17 pages is take shorthand almost, either visually or plotwise. The reader has to put it

gether in his head even though it's only implied on the page. If you look for something that explains it all in black-and-white, you can't always find it. It's a trick I've been using because a lot of the plots I've been doing in 17 pages are really too intricate to do. Nobody complains about this because they don't notice what's happening. If they don't notice what they're forced to do then the trick is succeeding. They're unconsciously formulating what I've implied.

CF: They're providing the filler for the gaps, they're envisioning the cut panels...

BATES: Yeah. And they aren't even aware that they're doing it. You have to be careful because if you're too intricate you can go over their heads. What I'm always trying to do is to find that balance between a plot that's too complicated to understand and a plot that is spelled out.

CF: A good example of that type of plotting is your recent "**Bride of Luthor**" (**ACTION 510-12**) storyline...

BATES: Yeah, that plot was too complicated to spell out directly. It would have taken up too much space, but I squeezed everything in (including a series of clues and the solution) by collapsing everything. I made the reader work with me. The story was interesting so the reader figured out what was going on in the plot.

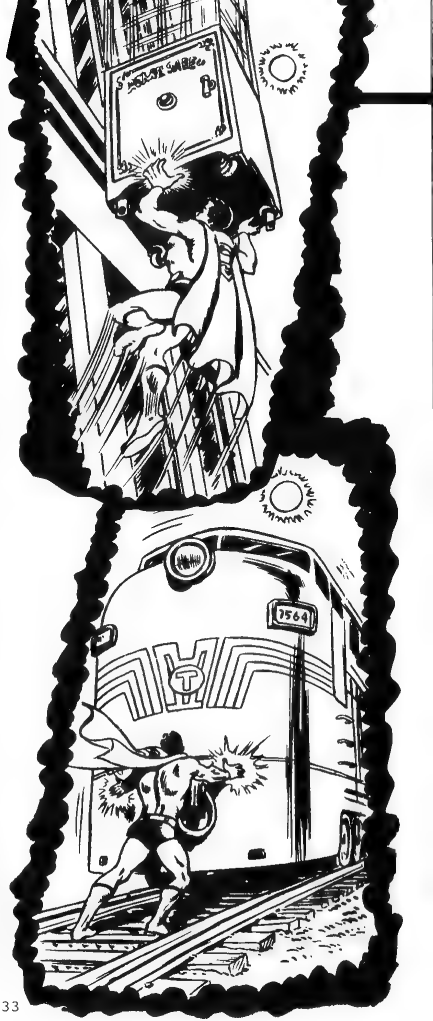
That was an incredibly complex plot and a lot of it was left out.If you had to summarize that plot on paper, you wouldn't be able to find it in the panels because it just isn't there.

CF: As long-time mystery and comics readers we caught the clues and figured out most of the plot.

BATES: It's funny, out of all the letters we received on the first and second issues, only one person figured out what was going on. The same thing with **The Return of Jonathan Kent**" (**ACTION 507-8**). That is a really satisfying feeling. I figure that if the readers are ahead of me I'm not doing my job. One thing I always try to do in my stories is not let the reader get ahead of me. They might think they're ahead, but then I pull a switch and show them they're not. I used to always get a kick out of that when I was reading comics. I think one of the reasons I lost interest was after a while the writers couldn't do that to me anymore. I knew all the tricks, I knew all the formulas. There was nothing to keep me there.

CF: One of the things about your recent "**Bride of Luthor**" story, is one of the things that seems very difficult to do as far as the Superman stories are concerned in that there is a really limited room to maneuver the character progression. The Marvel style is pretty much predicated on having characters die, etc., and not much of that shifting is allowed in the **SUPERMAN** line. It does seem to be a particularly difficult assignment. The **SUPERBOY** comic even more so. And on "**The Bride of Luthor**" story we had bets going whether or not Luthor was really going to reform or marry this woman. Do you feel constrained that you can't always do these, um, "Marvel-style" progressions?

BATES: Not really. I've always accepted some things as



WELL HERE HE IS CLARK--MY MYSTERY GUEST! I'M SURE HE NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION.
GREAT SCOTT! IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER--I'D SWEAR I'M STANDING FACE-TO-FACE WITH MY FOSTER FATHER--JONATHAN KENT!
WE'LL TALK LATER, LOIS!
BE CAREFUL, DARLING...
....AND GOOD LUCK, SON!

givens. I can't really **focus** my stories on any problems that just can't be resolved (like Lois and Superman's ever-delayed marriage), but I can make use of whatever opportunities come along in that respect. Those things come up once in a while—like the scene in the "**Pa Kent**" story with Pa and Lois. That got a tremendous response. Now whenever we refer to that relationship we have to do it on two levels, one where she knows Clark and Superman are the same and the other she doesn't. The reader is in a "**Lady-and-the-Tiger**" situation. You never really know now. I think that tantalizes the reader. There is now a mystique to Lois' character that differentiates her from Lana even more so than her personality already does. There are ways like that to infuse new tensions in old established relationships. Those ideas unfortunately don't come up too often because they're very elusive. I'm not even sure if there are that many of them left. But when they do, it's great.

CF: Speaking of the differences between Lois and Lana's personalities, back in the '60s there didn't really seem to be that great a gulf between them. I think the Marty Pasko-written issues were the ones that established the differences between them.

BATES: I think that absence of Lana's was very good because it gave us a chance to **almost** do her all over again. What's happened now is that it's very clear that she is a more ambitious, egocentric, outgoing girl than Lois is, more into the "star system." Now that she realizes there is no future for her and Superman, she's gotten even more independent, even tougher than Lois in some ways. By no means can you interchange their characters now. I think

RROOO
OAAARR
I REMEMBER WHAT I WAS TO DO! THE NEW FORM OF ENERGY FROM THIS SOLAR FURNACE IS STARTING A CHAIN REACTION WHICH MIGHT IGNITE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE! THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO STOP IT!

because of her understanding with Superman, the idea that there can never be anything between them, she's more interesting. Another thing we've been getting a lot of response on is her relationship with the Vartox figure who keeps coming in and out. Again that's something we couldn't have done wif she were still chasing Superman.

CF: Let's see, you've got the **SUPERMAN** book which is mainly focusing on the WGBS news show and Marv (Wolfman) is doing the **Daily Planet** stories?

BATES: Well, that was more the original conception when it started soon after the movie. What's happened now is that Clark's in both settings, however impossible that is. It was an effort to make the movie make sense because up to then we had nothing about the Planet in the series. I think that a lot of people, myself included, missed the **Daily Planet.** To have totally removed him was a mistake. The situation now just gives us more opportunities, more settings for the stories.

CF: Do you prefer working with the newsroom staff?

BATES: I choose the supporting characters more on the situation of the story than anything else. If the story is good for the TV group, in they come. If it's more newspaper out go the TV guys and in comes the **Planet.**

CF: It seems that over the last year you've been doing the Lana/TV stories and Marv has been doing the Lois-oriented Planet stories. Do you think that effects the tone of the stories any?

BATES: Whenever we have more than one writer doing a character you are going to have tone shift problems. Whether it's better to avoid having tone-shift problems by having one writer do one character and another doing the other...that might just add to the problem. I think the best guideline is the one we've been using. There are no hard and fast rules about character use. If you're doing a story that requires Lana, then you get Lana. But I think generally we have divided the two characters up as you mentioned.

CF: Do you have general character sketches which either Julie keeps or all the writers know about?

BATES: I don't think we need them. Julie, Marv and I know the characters so well that we don't need guidelines. It's like what happened with the **Mary Tyler Moore Show.** After three or four seasons, anyone could have written the lines for the characters: you knew what they were going to say before they said it. The **characters** worked as defined personalities. It's the same way with the **SUPERMAN** cast. They've been so well-defined, especially in the last ten years, that I don't think there is much confusion as to what their personalities are.

CF: So you don't see any significant variation between the Superman in **ACTION** and Superman in his own title?

BATES: Oh, yes, I do. But I don't think that's caused by different interpretations of the characters used. I think it's caused by the differences that the various writers bring to the strips. My stories are different from Pasko's. A writer puts an imprint on a story. A reader who is really up on

"BACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY, AN INFANT NAMED KAL-EL WAS ROCKETED TO EARTH JUST AS HIS NATIVE PLANET, KRYPTON, EXPLODED!"
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT GHASTLY DAY!

following the books could probably identify a writer without a credit. Maybe not as easily as an inker, but after a while you can do that.

CF: Speaking of a writer putting his imprint on the books investing the books he writes with his own characteristic touches, does Julie act as co-ordinator of the **SUPERMAN** mythos?

BATES: Pretty much. With regards to specifics and facts we go to Nelson, he's like a walking encyclopedia as far as that goes. What they finally realized about three or four years ago was that while it probably wasn't a good idea to have one guy handle all seven **SUPERMAN** books, it was a good idea to have all the main titles under one editor's control. So they consolidated the four main titles under Julie. That way the books have more consistency.

I think that was a very good move because the stories I do for Murray Boltinoff and the stories I do for Julie are very different. In this business you are paid to give the editors what they want.

CF: Is the editor guided by what he thinks is the commercial desires of the audience?

BATES: Yeah, like I think that if we had made up a fake name for me when I was writing **THE FLASH** for Ross, I bet that most readers wouldn't have been able to recognize me. The stories were so markedly different from what I had

been doing. What I think Len is doing now is taking the best elements of what Julie did, and taking what Ross and I did in terms of continuity and injecting some realism, and combining the best of the two different approaches. I hope that the readers will agree with me.

CF: About the stories that dealt more in the emotions of the characters than the gimmicks, have you noticed (as we have) a change in the stories which you have been writing over the past two or three years?

BATES: Yes, I have. About two, two-and-a-half years ago, I made a conscious effort...almost an experiment...to knock myself out over every story. I tried to put more of myself into the stories. I realized that up until that time I had been coasting in the stories I was writing, based on my own terms. They weren't up to the standards I knew I was capable of, and I just wanted to see if I did this and didn't tell anybody, if anybody would notice. And the letters — I have to go by letters and what people tell me — the letters have indicated that it has been noticed.

CF: How about sales?

BATES: I know they're good. I know for a fact that sales of **THE FLASH** went way up when we has the "**Death of Iris**" series.

CF: Is there any indication if that was a reflection of the plot line or a general upgrade of story content.

BATES: I think they've just about decided it was the plot because Len and I are making a real concerted effort to increase continuity again. We have a plotline running now that is even more spell-binding, for lack of a better word, than the Iris thing. You haven't seen it yet. I think the continuity has a lot to do with it. The **SUPERMAN** stories are generally not continual serials, but I've been really trying to do things that not only are entertaining but are emotionally involving, that show sides of Superman that have never been shown before. I tried to extract what I thought made Mort's stories work. And tie them into the 1980s consciousness with the expectation for characterization.

CF: What are your personal favorites?

BATES: Recently, the "**Jonathan Kent**" stories and the "**Luthor**" stories in **ACTION**. Some of the **FLASHes** I've done with Carmine (Infantino) look very fine. If there is any one artist associated with one character it's Carmine and the Flash. I think he made **THE FLASH** what it is. You can separate other artists from characters but it's very hard to do it with him — not to criticize the other artists who have been doing it after Carmine left, but they haven't really been able to capture what he created. It was such a unique character and such a unique style. His whole style is so suited to that one concept. The reaction to the pages he's done so far has been like being in a time warp. It's like it's 1969 again or earlier. (I've forgotten when he quit now.) I think these past ten years, as I've written the **FLASH** I've always imagined it as if he were pencilling. Now to see it on the page just as I've imagined it...sometimes it's even **better** than I imagined it would look.

AT SUPER-SPEED, HE FLASHES TO THE SCENE...
SUPERMAN
OUR EXPERIMENTAL SOLAR POWER GENERATOR EXPLODED! DO SOMETHING, SUPERMAN... BEFORE THE CHAIN REACTION IGNITES THE ATMOSPHERE AND TURNS EARTH INTO A BALL OF FLAME!
B-920

CF: Would you say you are more satisfied with the stuff that you're turning out now than your previous work?

BATES: Yeah, I would.

CF: How would you characterize your favorite writers within the industry — just to give us a rough idea of what you look for in a story?

BATES: The main thing I look for in a story is something that pulls me in without having pre-knowledge of the character. I think I read fewer comics than most of my peers because I'm not a fan. I haven't been a fan since about 1965. I had been gradually losing interest throughout high school and if I hadn't started selling things I probably would have dropped out entirely, but having sold things, I found myself becoming interested on a different level. I think in a way that's been an advantage because one of the pitfalls a writer can fall into is being a fan and being too close to things, having the mentality that you are writing for the specialized group who have the same interests you do. I think it's my non-fan mentality that allows me to write a story for the mass audience, the readers with no presupposed knowledge about the material. The stories that I read and respond to are stories that I don't need to know anything about the Marvel Universe in order to get involved. To give you specific examples of what I like or don't like would be very tough because I read comics only sporadically. I think, in general, unless you are assured of having a book that appeals to a large specialized audience, and the Marvel books apparently do...

CF: The "fan favorites" certainly do.

BATES: I think you're running into trouble writing a story with that sort of slant to it. I think that Mort instinctively knew that, but we've gotten away from it a good deal. I think it's caused by the enthusiasm of the business: you're so sequestered and closed off from the rest of the world, you assume after a while that everyone shares your specialized interests. But you're really missing the boat that way because comics were never originally conceived for that kind of segmented audience. They were meant to have appeal to a massive audience.

Obviously I'm not regarded as some writers are, who are no better or worse as writers but are more revered in the fan circles because the fans can obviously tell that the

material is obviously pointed towards them, where my approach has always been to think of the more general reader. If a story works for a general reader then it should work for a fan, too. If it succeeds on one lesvel, it has to succeed on the other.

CF: There's no reason why it shouldn't. Craft is Craft.

BATES: Yes, but on the other hand if a story succeeds on a fan level, it could totally fizzle with a general reader because you're catering to those specialized people and you're missing the general one.

To have the conceit that a reader is going to pick up this book and be so anxious to read what happened in the last seven issues, when in reality the reader often has to be convinced to buy the book in the first place, is unrealistic. He's going to flip through the book and there's going to have to be something to catch his interest. A compression of four preceding issues isn't going to do that. You have to pretend that the reader is being won over for the first time every time you write a book. I think that's the attitude you have to have. I don't care how much you have to explain, you have to find a way to give it to the reader so he doesn't know he's digesting it. It has to be snuck in there. That's something that I think has been missed quite often in these continuing storylines. You look at **FLASH**, which is the most serial-oriented thing I ever did, the most Marvel-oriented thing I ever did, because that really ran like twelve or thirteen issues. We tried to write each story so that we wouldn't have to tell the reader everything that happened the issue before. We gave them just enough to keep the momentum of the story going.

CF: Would you say the Marvel-oriented influence, as you called it, came from Ross Andru?

BATES: Only in the sense that Marvel sort of pioneered the idea of a story running over many issues. Having a major character going through a catharsis like that.

CF: Actually I think that the long serial involving Supergirl's existence being revealed to the world (**ACTION 273-285**) was the first time that a continued story was tried.

BATES: Yeah, I guess Mort invented that, too.

CF: Speaking of new things to do with a character...how do you come up with new ideas? You've been working on **THE FLASH** and **SUPERMAN** FOR YEARS....

BATES: Fourteen years, altogether.

CF: You're the senior **SUPERMAN** writer and crank them out month after month; how do you keep from going stale?

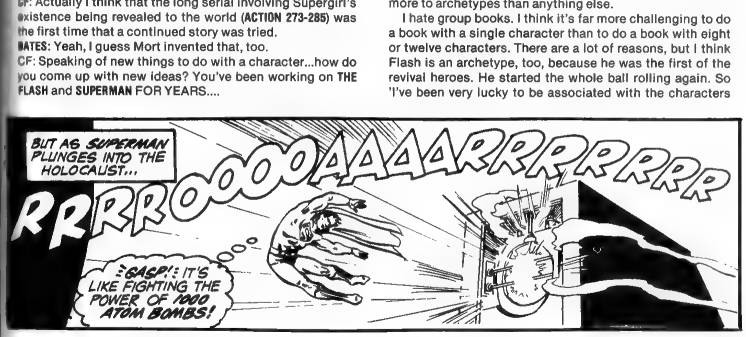
BATES: I think it's precisely because I've done it so long that it's now second nature for me to try and find things that have never been done. I think it's a case of becoming so familiar with something that you don't have to manufacture ideas, they just spring from what you know about the character. It's very rare that I'm stuck totally for an idea. I think it's a very good idea to be on books for long stretches if you can use the familiarity as a positive force as opposed to it being a boring exhaustion; I think it depends a good deal on your attitude. So far I've been able to use my familiarity as a plus factor; if that ever changes it'll be time for me to move on to something else.

CF: Is it because you are so familiar with the characters that you've come to know them...

BATES: I think that's partially it. I grew up with Superman. I read the comics, watched the TV shows, wore a costume. The Flash, though, was my favorite super-hero. Of all the characters I have read, those are the two that affected me the most. I think that might be part of it. I've always had an innate connection with the characters. They're not just an assignment; they're enjoyable to write.

I never tire of Superman or the Flash for that matter. I think the reason is that I've been doing it so long that I'm constantly trying to go beyond what I've done. It's hard to start work on a new character. It's easy for me to extend myself because I've been on the books so long. The fact that I continually have to fight with being bored with them forces me to experiment and do things that are difficult — and don't always succeed, but at least I'm trying. I know that I'm certainly more comfortable with the characters I write, probably because I've worked with them so long. But also Superman is an archetype and I seem to gravitate more to archetypes than anything else.

I hate group books. I think it's far more challenging to do a book with a single character than to do a book with eight or twelve characters. There are a lot of reasons, but I think Flash is an archetype, too, because he was the first of the revival heroes. He started the whole ball rolling again. So 'I've been very lucky to be associated with the characters



AS ROVING TV REPORTER CLARK KENT HEARS A NEWS BULLETIN IN HIS MOBILE TV VAN...
CALLING SUPERMAN! SOLAR FURNACE AT LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN OUT OF CONTROL! SCIENTISTS FEAR CATASTROPHE!
THERE'S MY CUE AGAIN!

that are up there on a pedestal. I'm also going to be working on **THE LONE RANGER** strip for the New York Times Syndicate. He again is an archetype. And I've tried to sell material on James Bond — he again is an archetype. And I've tried to sell material on Dirty Harry — he again is an archetype. So I find myself drawn — gravitating to each genre's typical character. The figures that started the whole ball rolling. Those are the characters I enjoy the most.

I seem to have this tendency to use archetypes. I've become an expert at simulating the Bond in the films — not so much in the books — but I'm able to do that now almost as easily as I do Superman. I've devoted so much time and study to it. The same with Dirty Harry. I was able to analyze it in the first movies and figure out what made Harry work and what people wanted to see Harry do.

It's a problem because there are hundreds of people writing **DIRTY HARRY** treatments. The competition is really rough. But if you try for something original, you face the other problem. You're all alone, you have to convince everybody that the idea's sound.

The only real thing to know about the film is that anything goes. The carrot dangling before me is that if I make one major sale, I'm automatically in. At least, I'd get another assignment. By the same token if you've been there for thirty years and you have one huge bomb, you're almost automatically out. It's a very fickle business in that sense. I'm constantly looking for that one big score.

CF: So your career goals are not really with comics? Comics are more than just your current profession.

BATES: Well, I really think that I reached a level that I'm trying to maintain but I don't really know if I can surpass it. I think I'm pretty much at my comics peak now. I don't thing the industry, at least in its current state, will uncover new uncharted areas in terms of creativity unless there is a radical change in the format but I don't see it happening in the immediate future. My aspirations are in film. Money is part of it, too, but my dream has always been to go into movie scripting. It's like seeing your name in print but a hundred times better. Of course, I haven't seen it yet so I can't tell you for sure.

CF: What type of rapport do you look for with your artist?

BATES: Well, I don't really have that much direct contact with them. Most of the artists I work with are happy with my scripts. They like the way I think in visual terms. They can see that I'm putting them in the forefront as far as the story is concerned. In other words, I don't like the old saying that writers put in a lot of captions because they're not sure that the artists will carry the mood and story. The artists **have** to do that! That's what comics are all about — they're a **visual medium.** You have to rely upon the artist. I'm always trying to think of the artist first. You have to write the story on a number of levels: you have to design it so that a casual newsstand purchaser can stand there and flip a few pages and be struck by the visuals on each page, and then you have to compose a story that a reader can really get involved with once he buys the book and goes home. If you can have a story that's visually exciting and has a good plot, you have a remarkable comic. If you can then do a story that has those two elements **and** says something between the lines, has a message, **then** you really have something.

But I think one of the considerations a writer should always keep in mind is what the artist has to put down on paper. That's why I hate to give an artist something that's impossible to do or not interesting to do. I'm always trying to think of some shtick or angle he can use if the scene is visually stagnant and potentially boring to the reader. I like to use the artist to get across plot points by having the artist do close-ups or long shots or close-focus on some

point key to the story. I try and have the **artists** give the precious piece of information. I don't want the readers dependent on the captions and the dialogue for all their information: the visuals should **show** the story just as much as the words **explain** it.

CF: You mentioned that you wanted to start as an artist and also that you are very interested in films. Do you think that might have influenced the way you view the artist?

BATES: I think my fascination with films has helped me tremendously insofar as visually pacing a story. My work with the Broccoli people has taught me to space the visual element-story element progression-action-visual element, etc. I try to consciously do that two or three times every page. It's a rapid pace that keeps your interest up. It keeps you wanting to turn the page, keeps you interested, keeps you reading. The movies have also taught me how long a scene should last, the pacing of the story, how to balance the exposition and the action. That's very valuable in comics writing.

CF: What are the demands the industry makes on someone like you who seems concerned about maintaining your professional attitude?

BATES: Well, it's like always being late on your homework. It's like having to do a real job. I'm doing more now, just bulk-wise, than I was doing, say, four or five years ago. The pressure to always produce what averages out to be one story a week, week in, week out, year after year...forget it. If you think about it like that you're going to get, well...almost disgusted. So you look at it **one** story at a time. I find myself often hating it, especially the last five pages of a story. I hate finishing a story — maybe because it means that I'll have to start another one. But other times I love doing it, I enjoy the writing. You just have to be able to ride the ups and downs, always deliver, and always be dependable.

CF: In that respect it sounds like any other job.

BATES: Except in one respect: you have to reach a certain level of competence. When you're hacking...no, not hacking...when you're not doing your utmost (this is one of my definitions of a professional) if only **you** know your stories are not up to par — if only **you** can tell, then you've succeeded in reaching this level of competence. Because if other people can come up to you and say you were off with that story or you were tired or whatever, then I don't think you've done your job. So many times I've turned in stories that I wished I had done, I knew I **could** have done, a little more, but no one else knew that. In that sense I think you have to reach that level of competence, that level of reliability in this business.

On the other hand, there's occasionally the story which you think is terrific and nobody likes it. That happens too.

CF: Has it happened recently to you?

BATES: Well, all I go by is the mail, and I must say that during the last two years the stories I've liked, the mail has borne me out. I have to be happy with a story before I turn it in . If I don't like it, I usually have a lot of trouble with it. I

tinker and try to fix it. It'll only give you ulcers if you're working on a story and all the way through it you're saying "This is no good! This won't work!"

CF: I guess one of the drawbacks of the business is that since you have to turn in a series every week you don't have the luxury to go over and re-do things...

BATES: Well I know I don't have the time but sometimes I do rewrite stories. It's not financially sound to spend four or five weeks on a story, but at times you find you just can't think of the money, you just don't let that stop you as far as the story is concerned. So you lose a night's sleep or pay a bill a little late. You learn to live with it.

That's one of the odd things about the industry. It's not like you're drawing a regular salary everyweek. If you need more money you write more. If you don't write, the bills don't get paid. Money always depends on when you turn a story in. You're always constantly fighting between the feelings of "Is this the best story I could do?" or "Do I need the check?" You try and find a medium, but usually the check loses.

Oh, did I tell you about **FLASH 300**? Well, what we're doing is an anniversary story. The basic premise is that Barry Allen was working in his police lab twenty years ago and chemicals spill over him. Then we switch to this private clinic where Barry Allen has been for twenty years. He's completely paralized. In his mind, due to this terrible accident, he's invented this fantasy that the accident gave him super-speed. So all these adventures he's been having as The Flash over the years have all been in his mind. And a psychiatrist is sitting next to him saying, "Look, Mr. Allen, if lighting strikes a bunch of chemicals and they spill all over you they won't give you super-speed. They'd scar you, put you in a coma, and paralyze you for life." Then he pulls out an issue of **ALL-STAR COMICS** and says, "Look, Mr. everybody knows The Flash was your hero. Obviously your childhood memories are causing this delusion." Iris visits him with her husband and two kids. Iris waited for him to recover for two or three years and then she got married. It's not an imaginary story or anything like that. That's the situation.

CF: Have you talked to Carmine about **THE FLASH** and is he as enthusiastic about taking it over as he once was?

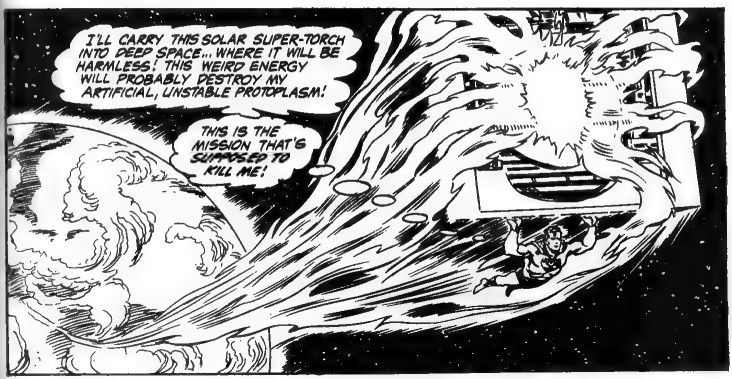
BATES: Oh, yes. He's got a whole bunch of new visual concepts for **THE FLASH** . He won't tell us what they are, but he's really excited about them.

CF: You don't think he resents working on something that he left behind him fifteen years before?

BATES: No, I think he's revived his interest because of the stuff he's done in the interim. I think all the Marvel work and the Warren work got him doing different enough things so he's excited about doing **THE FLASH** again.

I think both the Elongated Man and The Flash are so suited to his way of drawing, that he was able to visualize their odd powers particularly well. Plus the way he makes the Flash move — it's so simple when you talk about it, but no one else has managed to catch it as well as he can.

CF: Are you planning on keeping the new supporting cast in


I'LL CARRY THIS SOLAR SUPER-TORCH INTO DEEP SPACE... WHERE IT WILL BE HARMLESS! THIS WEIRD ENERGY WILL PROBABLY DESTROY MY ARTIFICIAL, UNSTABLE PROTOPLASM!
THIS IS THE MISSION THAT'S SUPPOSED TO KILL ME!

THE FLASH?

BATES: We're definitely keeping the girl next door, Fiona, and we're going to bring back that actress, Daphne Dean. Now that Barry's single we're going to increase his social life.

I think it's going to be interesting bringing in his parents because they've been totally ignored except for one or two stories. I think it's very rare for an adult super-hero to relate to his father. They're either not around or they're dead. I think that's one reason there was such a positive reaction to the "**Jonathan Kent**" story. Even if they are alive, they generally don't know their son or daughter is a super-hero so they can't relate on that level. It's really weird to see a super-hero and his father as equals, yet they're not. I think that's another way to handle characterization: to show how one character acts or treats another character who's close to him. We've really neglected parents, though; we've generally focused on girlfriends.

Apparently **FLASH** is doing very well. I think that was another case where the book was getting stale. It has nothing to do with anyone associated with the book; I just think the marriage was a good idea in 1968, but after so many years there was nothing one could do with it. Instead of being a plus and a unique factor, it became a hindrance. It was bogging down the book. One thing I'm very proud about the **FLASH** is that we took so long to do the story of Iris' death and we did it — I won't say with glee — with such depth and giving it such importance. We also did it so there was no warning it was going to happen. In real life, death doesn't happen after a long series of dramatic incidents that build up to it. Usually it just **happens**. I really hate stories that you can tell by page three that the character is going to die on page twelve. Things are building and there is the gloom hanging over everything.

CF: The books that have "**Death of an Important Character**" as a cover blurb?

BATES: Yeah. What we did was an incredibly complicated plot where one of the things that just happened to happen was that Iris croaked. It hit the reader that way, too. Most of them wouldn't believe it was true. They had been so conditioned to believe over the years that deaths were never real in comics or that they just didn't happen this way. They really thought there was going to be a cop-out: it was going to be a parallel universe or something. We purposefully put things into the story so that readers could seize upon them and say, "Well, it's not going to be real because of (this or that)." We took great delight that after planting these things that could be "outs" Iris really was dead; that there really is death.

CF: Comics have been accused of not really having characters but at best resorting to stereotypes, but you've mentioned that you've been working to develop the characters of Clark and Flash, and Superman. Do you see them as stereotypes?

BATES: I do, actually. I think you have to make them interesting in spite of that. I think we all look at ourselves and classify ourselves as some type of stereotype. I think the same thing happens with the characters. But there is always something interesting you can do with the characters. They **are** familiar, but you can still find facets that haven't been explored before. When you find something new to say about the characters, it's like finding something

out about your best friend that you never knew before. that's the key: making the familiar reveal new twists. That's the key to making these characters interesting.

CF: How would you describe the Superman-Lois Lane relationship? Jules Feiffer has described the triangle as the expression of two "typical American relationships."

BATES: I think that was borne out by the movie. Chris Reeve said in all those interviews that when he played Clark Kent he was basically playing himself. I think that Clark is the link most of us have with Superman. Clark is the klutz within us. Superman is the epitome of what the ideal man should be—a fantasy fulfillment of what we all wish we could be. To have those two extremes in one character, linked through love of the same woman, is such a compelling concept. I don't think Siegel & Shuster knew what they had when they invented it, but I think that that has a lot to do with the character surviving this long. For too many years we overlooked that aspect of the character's attraction. We got away from it and it's probably the ess- tial essence of the character. Like sometimes we'd stories that didn't have Clark in them at all. And while th okay once in a while, if you do too much of that you going to lose the tension between Superman and Clark.

I remember the Clark-Superman distinction started to concentrated on again as early as 1973 or 1974. We decid we had to pay more attention to it. We brought in Ste Lombard to focus attention on Clark's klutziness...

CF: To what extent do you think the Clark Kent identity just a pose to disguise Superman? There seems to be great difference of opinion among writers...

BATES: I think Kent is incredibly real. He's been that identi every since he was found by the Kents. I think emphasizi the reality of the Clark identity and the necessity for it easier to do now that we have a **SUPERBOY** comic. I've always made it a point in those stories to prove that th Clark identity is really necessary to him to function a Superboy. Clark was a very real person as a teenager; h knew who he was. Clark isn't an alien from Mars, wearing disguise, and walking the streets: he's a human, raised b humans, and who acts and thinks like a human. Superma really is two people; the alien and the human. I think eac persona is completely real and valid. I think one of the i teresting tensions in the book comes from which of th two identities is stronger. You can emphasize one over h other depending on the story, but what always come through, no matter what you emphasize, is the fact that yo can't really separate the two. You can't discard one identit completely.

CF: But what about Kent's character traits? Perhaps hi timidity is assumed, but what about his introversion?

BATES: I think Kent is introverted. I think if he had to b Superman all the time, he'd be introverted if he was wearin the costume or not. The introversion of Clark Kent is actin as a release, a welcome release, from being Superman. B the same token, Superman gets a lot of the adulation Cla craves but can't get in that identity. The whole thing abou Clark becoming a newscaster sort of rocked the boat as fa as I was concerned. I think the less Kent is on the air, th better it will be for the reader. It seems to invalidate all thi character separation. Also being seen by millions o people every day is not the best thing to do for a living i you are trying to keep a secret identity.

CF: Would you like to get rid of the TV association?

BATES: No. I think the idea of having both the TV studio an the Planet as springboards is good. It gives him suitab backdrops for different character emphasis and differen casts. I know why they put him on TV; it makes sense whe you remember that kids, especially young kids, are fa likeller to be familiar with TV news than with newspape reporting. Kids don't read newspapers.

CF: Would it have been a better idea to have cast him as TV reporter or a producer, someone who is not the main stay of the program?

BATES: Maybe, except what he basically had as both reporter and an anchorman is the responsibility to get hi own stories. It's not real in the sense that most anchorme

re spoonfed the material by other reporters, so obviously e newsroom situation isn't realistic.

CF: There's just a certain amount of suspension of disbelief at has to be brought in about that and say other conven- ons like the glasses...

BATES: You know I think Julie and Marty did a story once xplaining the glasses...That's like explaining why Super- an has blue hair. I think there are just some things in omics that don't need to be explained. The readers just ave to accept them or the whole structure of the comic oesn't work. You can make a whole list of the conventions at glue the story together, I don't think the readers need, want them explained.

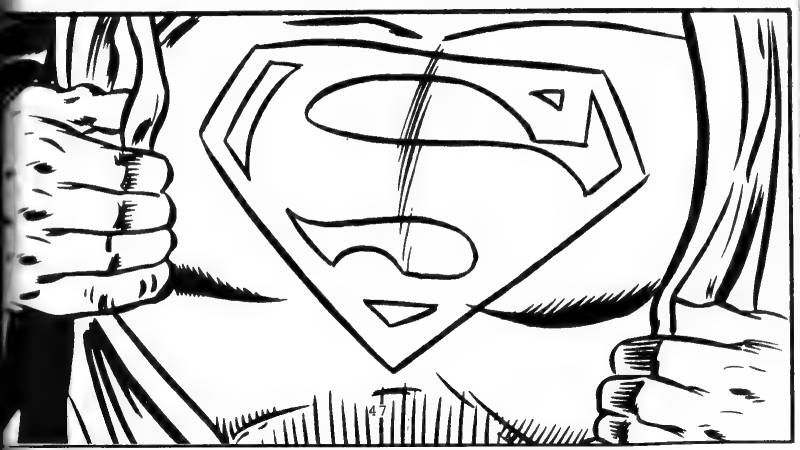
CF: Is there THE SUPERMAN 'story as far as you're concer- ed? The story you always have wanted to write, but can't ecause it would change the legend?

BATES: I don't know. That's a good question. I must admit m not too thrilled with Kandor not being around anymore. really loved that as a gimmick. I think there were a lot of hings that had yet to be done with the concept. But if I had total control over the book, I guess I could invent something s totally earthshaking as Kandor— something that really ould shake up the whole legend. Something as radical as if uperman had a brother — that's been done to death — ut something as upsetting as that. Something like what if e had a power that he's always had but can never use. e's not allowed to use it. Something like that.

I really like to do stories like that: making the obvious in- eresting. Like the "**Light from Krypton**" **(ACTION 489)**: that was here all the time, but no one had ever thought of using it efore. You're picking up on an idea that had virtually been nder everyone's nose, but no one else noticed it. You take things that are established but you develop it in a new way, you take a different slant. But you're not inventing something or contriving new things that the reader can tell by the third page this would only happen in a comic. I really hate it when the writer contrives something, puts his characters into situations, strictly to generate action and the plot. Like when a comic opens and on the first page the hero is flying at a villain on a rooftop while saying: "You won't escape me this time! Just wait 'til you see this new story gimmick!" No movie or book starts that way. It's like you're starting in the middle of the story. No motivation, no buildup. I think the first couple of pages are very important for the **story**. You have to establish so much in the way of character identification, motivation highlighting, just lots of things. I resent it when some writer uses those pages just for another fight and doesn't treat it like the start of a **story**, but rather another installment of a running fight.

CF: Obviously you have a working definition of what is a good story? Plot structure seems to have a good deal to do with that. It seems that characterization now is fairly important. Is there anything else that you think is necessary to transform a story from a professional job into a job that you can be proud of?

BATES: I am looking for something that isn't stated in the story but is there for the reader to surmise. In my "**Jonathan Kent**" story there were a lot of emotional ramifications to his seeing his son again as an adult when he thought he would. I always try to write a story that says something about the human condition, love, about man's relationship with others. Maybe not very intricate messages or very earth-shattering...it's all simple stuff. But, then, most messages really are if they're universal.



REBIRTH

JOHN BYRNE'S SUPERMAN

In June, the first issue of **The Man of Steel** hit the stands presenting John Byrne's reworking of the Superman legend into a more streamlined form. Gone is the vast family of stars whose numbers had made them their own distinct and identifiable minority group on our fair planet. In the wake of DC's **Crisis On Infinite Earths** mini-series with its winnowing down of the DC universe's super-populace, the new Superamania accelerates the remake. Supergirl died in the **Crisis;** in the new era of Superman she will never have lived at all.

Since he first appeared in **Action Comics** number one in 1938, Superman periodically undergoes cosmetic surgery to sweep out the clutter which accumulates over the years.

John Byrne put things into perspective on a recent *Today Show* appearance when he stated, "This is about the fifth time that a 'fix' has been done on the character, but this is the most sweeping. Over the years we have reached points — basically at about 15 year intervals — where we've said "Something has got to be done here!' " This time, John Byrne was the man to get the job done.

Back in 1983, in **Comics Feature** 27, Byrne was already intimating his interest in Superman revealing that it was the first American comic book that he'd ever seen after moving to Canada from England.

"The very first exposure was Superman," Byrne states, "I locked into Batman and Superman and Superboy, all of what was to become the Superman family books." Byrne had also thought about how Superman could do exactly what he does. When asked to elaborate on some of his thoughts on how Superman exercises his abilities, at the time he stated, "Boy, that would be opening such a can of worms! The only thing I've really gotten into is applying the Marvel logic to Superman. We start with being willing to stretch disbelief that a character can do a thing. Then we try to come up with a logic as to why they can do it. Since Superman seems to be able to do all manner of things that defy physical law as we understand them, I just look at it and say, 'Well, there must be some kind of psionic power here.' Because if you pick up a building by one corner, the building will fall aprart unless you are somehow physically or mentally holding it together."

Byrne has been prepared for a long time for his ultimate creative challenge — the recreation of Superman in his own artistic vision.

While there have been superficial attempts to rework the hero in the past, the climate for substantive change was just never there — until now. In 1971, DC's idea of making a big change in Superman was to render all of the kryptonite on Earth inert — but that was as far as it went. No new direction was established, and stories proceed along lines not much different from what had gone on before. But in 1985, DC published **Crisis on Infinite Earths** in which old standbys such as The Flash and Supergirl met their dooms and Earth II (as well as all of the other parallel universes populated by innumerable heroes and villains) was wiped out, taking many Golden Age characters with it including the alternate Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. In this climate of radical house-cleaning, radically streamlining Superman seemed more attractive. John Byrne was given the go-ahead to return the Man of Steel to the way in which he was first formed by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in 1938.

"We have restructured his history because a lot of debris gathered in a 50 year period," stated Byrne on his **Today Show** appearance.

"Everybody else with 'Super' in front of their name — Supergirl, Superdog, Supercat, Superbat, Superaardvark — All of these are gone. I don't think we'll miss them!"

What made this revamping of Superman different is that DC was reworking their whole fictional universe. Frank Miller was portraying a very different Batman in his **Dark Knight** series and George Perez is developing a plan to breathe new life into the red, white and blue adventures of Wonder Woman. Elsewhere Jan Strnad has completely redesigned the Atom and Tony Isabella and Richard Howell have set a new direction for Hawkmen. The winds of change are in the air as DC is looking to its new talent to attempt to reverse the decline that has plagued the company for over 15 years.

YOU DON'T REALLY WANT TO STEAL THAT YOUNG WOMAN'S PURSE, DO YOU?
SHE DOESN'T LOOK AS IF SHE HAS MUCH MORE MONEY TO SPARE THAN YOU
MM-MMMM MM-MMMM MM-MMMM
S

ENTER JOHN BYRNE

Artist John Byrne first encountered Superman by means of the Fifties TV series.

"That was the beginning, then," says Byrne in his afterward to **Man of Steel** issue one. "The beginning of a fascination with comic books in general, and Superman in particular, that has persisted more or less constantly to the present day. I grew up reading comics. Probably I was not a steady consumer for more than six or seven years but that amounted to a good third of my life, then. Comic books were a very important part of the shaping of my imagination, and DC comics in particular.

Over the years, Byrne saw the Superman family of characters grow to ridiculous levels. " There was already Krypto, the Superdog. Now came Kara, Superman's cousin, who called herself Supergirl. She won her own series and gave the world Streaky, the Supercat and Comet the Superhorse." Then there was Beppo, the supermonkey and Titanno, the superape who had lethal Kryptonite vision.

But this was a far cry from the pure form of the character as the only survivor of a doomed world.

"I think one of the most important aspects of the character was that he was the *sole* survivor of the doomed planet Krypton, and now he's that again. Nobody else walked away from that.

"DC Comics has hired me to guide the reshaping of the Superman legend," Byrne continues in **Man Of Steel**. "To try to pare away some of the barnacles that have attached themselves to the company's flagship title. To try to make Superman of today as exciting in his own right as was that primal Superman of yesterday. To try to recreate Superman as a character more in tune with the needs of the modern comic book audience. A much *smaller* audience than when I was ten years old. But a much more demanding one, too."

One of Byrne's tenets in reworking the character is that Superman never publicly reveal that he has a secret identity. This allows him to create a more unfettered life for Clark Kent. In fact, Clark is much different from any version of him portrayed in comic books before.

"He isn't as mild-mannered any more — he's a little more oomphy!" Byrne stated on *Today*. "He's always been a wimp. Unfortunately poor Clark has had to run around pretending not to be Superman. He had no depth to himself.

"Now we've restructured it so that the world no longer knows that he has a secret identity, so he doesn't have to pretend not to be Superman any more."

But Clark is still a reporter. "He's the best reporter cum feature writer cum whatever else it is he does on the **Planet**." in that way the character will more closely follow the traditional concept rather than the TV news anchor job he was given during the last facelift the character was given.

"He was on TV for awhile. That ties him down too much. When you have to be on-camera you can't be dashing off to phone booths changing to Superman. It kind of cramps your style."

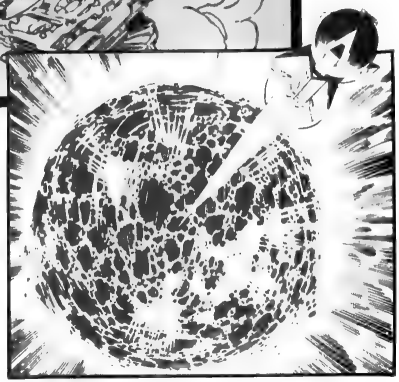
But lest we forget, Lois Lane will still be around, although in a form that is more self-assured and self-motivating. Not unlike the version of Lois portrayed in the Superman motion pictures of recent years.

What will be gone are some fo the other ties that developed over the years, including his close friendship with Bruce Wayne/Batman. The professional distance that will exist between them was strongly hinted at in their one scene together in Frank Miller's **Dark Knight**, volume three.

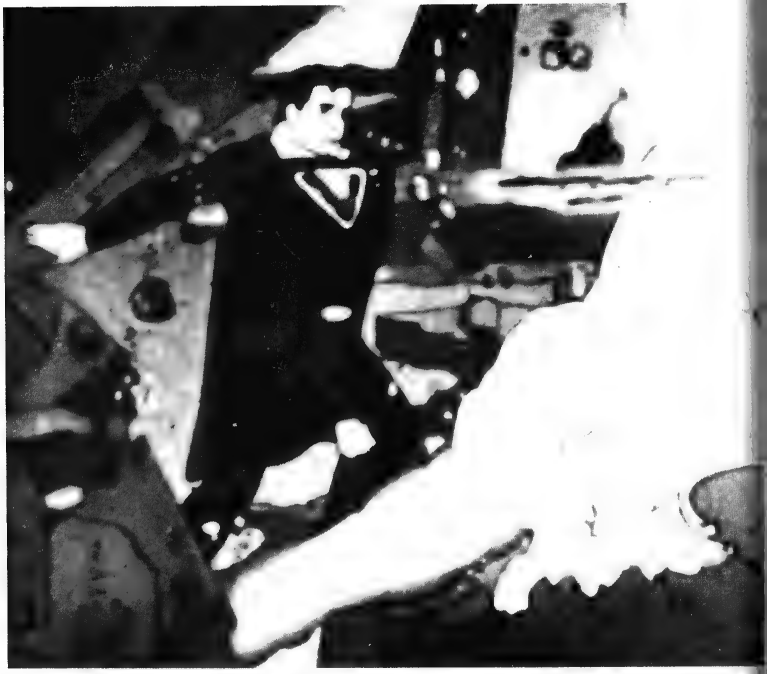
But skeptics of such sweeping changes remain. Some cynics compare the reworking to last year's introduction of the "new Coke" and the mixed response which that received.

"We've heard that reference a lot," Byrne stated, "and the point that we make is that we are doing *classic* Superman because we're taking him back to where he started."

Whether this means that things have come full circle or actually made a daring leap forward remains to be seen and judged by the toughtest critics of all — the buying public.



THE FANTASTIC FLEISCHER SUPERMAN



In the bleak mountains overlooking Metropolis, a criminal mastermind crumples the front page of the latest edition of the **Daily Planet**, expressing his outrage over the city's refusal to meet his ransom demands. Accompanied by his cohorts, he descends into the deepest recesses of his hideaway to enter the sleek, powerful rocket car which then cruises down a long tunnel before being launched with a deafening whine of incredible engines which speed it into the cold nighttime sky.

The city waits, guards with machine guns prowling the streets. There is tension in the silence. Then it's seen, captured briefly in the spotlight as it streaks through the heavens, its own spotlight centered on its megalithic target, the city power plant. Like an angry metal demon, the rocket car smashes into the power plant and erupts from the other side, shooting skyward, the chatter of automatic gunfire drowned out by the exploding building.

Then Metropolis goes dark.

***

The scene described is not from the pages of an early comic book, but from the Paramount Superman cartoon "The Bulleteers," and it's one of the most effective sequences in the entire series of Superman cartoons which came out of the Fleischer studios in Miami, Florida in the early Forties.

Unlike the Superman cartoons currently seen on Saturday mornings, the Fleischer Supermans were produced in the days when full animation was a new art instead of the all but lost one it has become today.

For those who haven't seen them, the cartoons can be compared to what was being done in the early Disney features of the time as Fleischer Studios was an active competitor of Disney and was always striving to equal and outdo it in the realm of animation. They never succeeded in this goal, and in fact when Fleischer closed down, many of his animators went over to Disney looking for work. But in their day the Fleischer brothers produced some more than memorable animation fare.

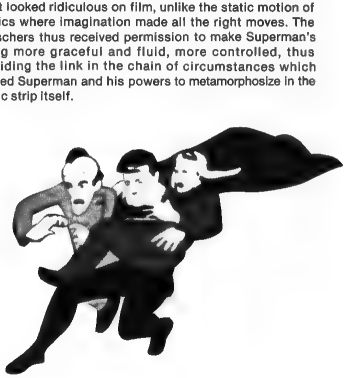
Following the runaway success of the Superman character in comic books (which launched the sprawling era of the superhero comic which we know today), filmmakers sought out National Periodical Publications to negotiate the adaptation of the character to the silver screen. Republic Pictures (who had produced the Captain Marvel serial) were interested in acquiring the rights, but they refused to relinquish quality control to DC. C.C. Beck, the creator of Captain Marvel, describes Republic's attitude at the time as, "We don't need your help. We know how to make movies." Considering how super-heroes have generally fared at the merciless hands of Hollywood, it's apparent that this attitude still flourishes, the 1978 Superman motion picture being a rare exception.

Paramount secured the rights to produce animated cartoons, and then approached the Fleischers (This was before Paramount had wrested control of the animation studio away from the Fleischers). But Dave Fleischer protested that it would be much too expensive to produce because of the special effects it would require and the demands of realism in animation. When Paramount asked how much, Dave Fleischer pulled a figure out of the air of $100,000.00, four times the cost of producing a regular cartoon at their studio. Paramount agreed to the figure and Fleischer found himself committed to producing the series.

Joe Shuster, the artist and co-creator of Superman, was flown to Miami to draw up character studies so that the cartoon version would resemble their comic book counterparts. With the exception of some holdover elements from their regular humor cartoons which cropped up in their first Superman short, Fleischer Studios succeeded handsomely in following the character's look and presentation.

This was still fairly early in the comic strip career of the man from Krypton and he had not yet been festooned with every superpower imaginable to DC's stable of writers. The Superman of the Fleischer production did not fly (or more accurately levitate) with the grace of the man of steel who followed later. Here we had a Superman who didn't just leap in to the air to gain flight, but who actually pushed off from the ground or buildings to launch himself into motion.

In order to work out the complicated special effects used in many of these cartoons, pencil tests were done (animated pencil drawings), some of which showed the man of steel leaping a tall building in a single bound. They felt it looked ridiculous on film, unlike the static motion of comics where imagination made all the right moves. The Fleischers thus received permission to make Superman's flying more graceful and fluid, more controlled, thus providing the link in the chain of circumstances which caused Superman and his powers to metamorphosize in the comic strip itself.



Oddly enough, though, one cartoon did not use the more free-flowing motion of flight for the man of steel, for in "The Arctic Giant," the fourth episode released, Superman leaps with no more ease or grace than does the Hulk, quite different from the graceful power of flight he employed in the other cartoons.

When the first cartoon appeared in September 1941, it was released in the wake of an advertising blitz which included coming attraction trailers, something unheard of for an eight minute short.

The first episode, titled "Superman", featured all the hallmarks of the series, from complicated shadow work on the characters (called "modeling,") to intricate special effects like powerful, glowing beams of energy. The only drawback of this first cartoon was a curious comic-relief bird which hung around the mad scientist and seemed like something that would have been more at home in one of Fleischer's Popeye cartoons.

The voice of Superman in these animated classics was the late Bud Collyer, who was also the voice of radio's Superman in the Forties. Collyer's voice shifted dramatically from tenor to bass whenever he shucked his civilian attire and emerged as Superman. Collyer also returned as the vocal identity of the man of steel in the Sixties when a new series was created for Saturday morning viewing fare, but that series held nothing else in common with the Fleischer Brother version.

Since this series of cartoons had to be animated with more realism in mind than was needed in Fleischer's Popeye series, this sense was carried beyond just the animation of the principal characters. For the scene of a bridge destruction in the first cartoon, titled simply "Superman" (but also sometimes referred to as "The Mad Scientist"), a newsreel was studied which had recorded the breakup of the Silver Span bridge in Tacoma, Washington.

The directing techniques and angles used in these highly polished pieces of cinema were the same employed in making non-animated films. They used tracking shots, establishing shorts as well as dramatic closeups. Since this was full animation, the moods obtainable from deep colors and fragile lighting were also employed.

The sound effects used in these cartoons were obtained through various means. For instance, in the brief sequence when Krypton is shown exploding, the crackling explosion was obtained by amplifying the sound made of an apple being broken in half by a sound man's hands. The amplified

sounds of a sizzling steak stood up well as the electrical crackling of the super ray thrown against Supman in the very first cartoon.

While the Superman television series was generally more earthbound than the strip in the menaces which were encountered, the Fleischer cartoons were much more in keeping with the spirit of the comic. The villains pitted against Superman included a mad scientist in no less than four of the cartoon shorts, as well as a dinosaur, various hoodlums, fifth columnists and even ancient gigantic mummies returned to life. Two of the closest to the comic book spirit are "The Bulleteers" and "The Mechanical Monsters."

In "The Bulleteers," they wear costumes very similar to those of Fawcett's character Bulletman, and the rocket car they pilot is super strong and capable of incredible speeds. It can even ram buildings at high speed, a trait employed to wreck havoc in Metropolis. The climax when Superman finally catches up to it is quite spectacular as he crawls along the outside of the hull, gripping it to keep from falling, and finally peels open the metal canopy.

"The Mechanical Monsters" is one of the best as it encapsulates all that was great about the Fleischer approach to this series, all in one cartoon! The story involves super robots which are robbing jewels from metropolis. When tracked down, Superman engages in battle with no less than a dozen of them at once. He defeats them and then crashes down a door to rescue Lois. Lois is bound below a huge vat of molten steel. The villain orders Superman to halt or he'll dump the vat. Superman flinches involuntarily and the crook panics, hitting the switch. Superman leaps forward, lands behind Lois and spreads his cape as a shield, causing the molten metal to cascade off his back in one of the most impressive moments in animation ever seen.

A poorly copied version of this cartoon appeared in the late Seventies film **The Fantastic Animation Festival.**

As mentioned earlier, Superman wasn't all-powerful in these eight minute adventures and in fact was often given stiff competition, having to slowly dig his way out from beneath rubble in one and straining his utmost to stand up beneath a super energy barrage in another.

In "The Magnetic Telescope," a device holding an asteroid near Earth in order to study it is damaged, and when Superman is **unable** to divert the heavenly body's course, he uses his own body to join the severed cable and enable the machine to use its titanic forces to push the planetoid back into space while super energies pulsate through Superman all the while.

The original music in these mini-extravaganzas was by Sammy Timberg, who provided as much atmosphere in his own way as the animators did in theirs.

The head animators on this series included Willard Bowsky as well as Orestes Calpini, the latter having brought some unusual stylistic approaches to the storytelling, as evidenced in "Jungle Drums."

The stories in these cartoons were often more unusual than you'd think for the Forties. In "Electrical Earthquake," the mad scientist was an Indian who wanted to reclaim Manhattan for all other Indians. Interestingly, all action took place on Manhattan Island, where the **Daily Planet** seemed to be located!

These seventeen little gems are rarely seen today (although some are available on videotape), but when they are viewed, it's obvious that this is what animation was meant to accomplish when realism is the goal and the setting is pure imagination.

THE FLEISCHER SUPERMAN CARTOONS

(All dates given are year of release)

1) Superman (1941)
2) The Mechanical Monsters (1941)
3) The Billion Dollar Limited (1942)
4) The Arctic Giant (1942)
5) The Bulleteers (1942)
6) The Magnetic Telescope (1942)
7) The Electrical Earthquake (1942)
8) Volcano (1942)
9) Terror on the Midway (1942)
10) The Japoteurs (1942)
11) Showdown (1942)
12) Eleventh House (1942) — (Superman goes to Japan and punches them out!)
13) Destruction, Inc. (1942)
14) The Mummy Strikes (1943)
15) Jungle Drum (1943)
16) Underground World (1943)
17) Secret Agent (1944)

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by Ruth Kennedy
with Production Assistance
by Jim Keegan

SUPERMAN!

The very name conjures up magical images of a man in flight soaring through the air higher than any eagle has ever flown.

Images of spanning the stars with speeds approaching that of light itself, stopping only to push a planet around or to check out the center of a star.

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